POPULAR CULTURE IN INDONESIA

Fluid identities in post-authoritarian politics

Edited by Ariel Heryanto

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Ariel Heryanto is Senior Lecturer at the Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne, Australia. He is the author of *State Terrorism And Political Identity In Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (Routledge, 2006) and co-editor of *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia; comparing Indonesia and Malaysia* (Routledge, 2003).

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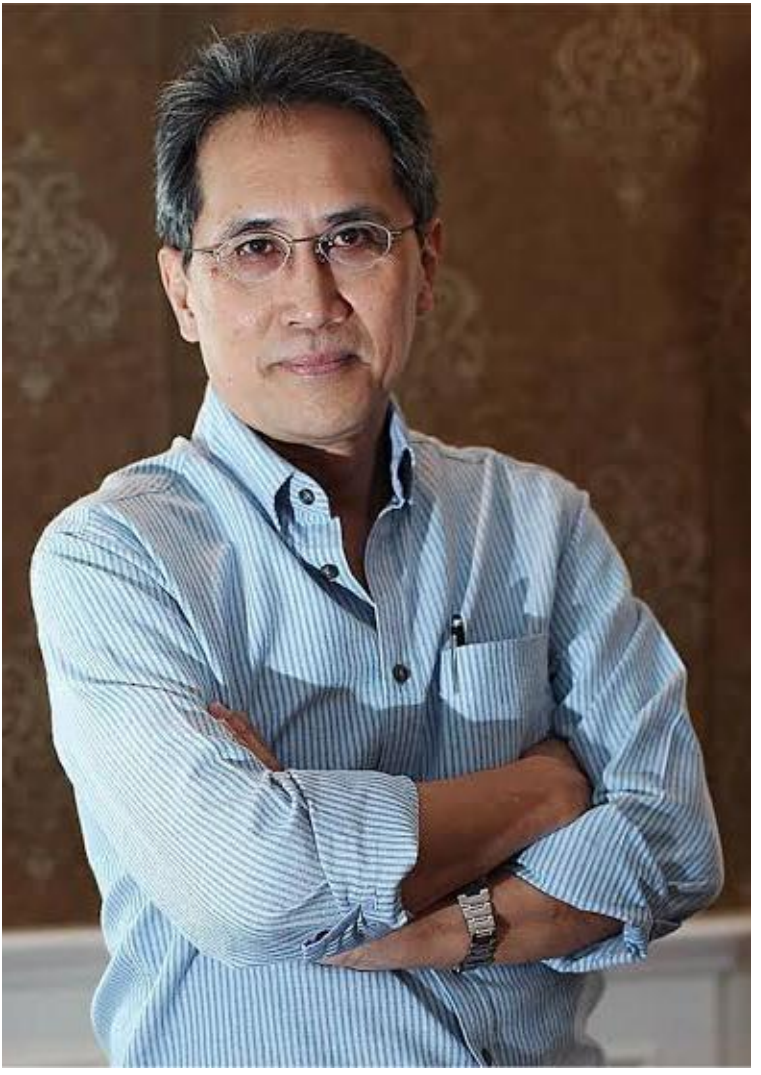

Popular Culture in Indonesia

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1 Pop Culture and competing identities

Ariel Heryanto

On 25 May 2007, Malaysia's largest and oldest mobile telecommunications company Celcom officially appointed Indonesia's best-known music group Peterpan as the company's new 'power icon' as part of its marketing strategy. Under the newly launched service called Channel X, the company's mobile phone subscribers will be able to download truetones, wallpapers and 'Call Me Tones' from Peterpan's newest album *Hari Yang Cerah* (A Clear Day) and the group's previous albums *Taman Langit* (Sky Garden) and *Bintang di Surga* (Star in Heaven). In addition to that, 'Celcom customers can also get exclusive Peterpan voicemail greetings through Channel X'; and in return Celcom 'secured exclusive rights to use Peterpan's music and images for mobile downloads and the band will also be featured in some of the Company's print and TV advertisements' (Mobile88.com 2007). The company's move can be appreciated within its immediate context. By then, an estimated 200,000 copies of Peterpan's various albums had been sold in Malaysia alone, when most of their domestic counterparts did not sell more than half that amount (Sartono 2007a), and two years earlier the group's live performance mesmerized a 30,000-strong audience who sang along enthusiastically to the songs, outdoing the artists on stage.

The warm reception that the Malaysian public extended to Indonesian musicians has a longer history. It dates back several decades, with the success of artists such as Titik Puspa, Lilies Suryani, the Titik Sandhora-Muchsin duet, Koes Plus, D'Lloyds, Broery Marantika, Bob Tutupoly, Harvey Malaihollo, and Vina Panduwinata (Sartono 2007b). In the 2000s, Peterpan were only one of several Indonesian musicians that were well received in the neighbouring country. What distinguished Peterpan from their compatriots both past and present, as well as their Malaysian counterparts, was the degree of their popularity. Understandably, Celcom's choice of Peterpan for its 'power icon' in May 2007 raised eyebrows among Malaysians, leading them to ask why the company had not chosen homebred musicians instead (Sartono 2007a).

To better appreciate the broader significance of the phenomenon, one should take into consideration the fact that all the above took place when diplomatic relations between the two governments and peoples were lukewarm at best,

and occasionally antagonistic at worst (Jacob 2007; *Kompas* 2007a, 2007c). In more recent times, tensions between these neighbours pertained to issues of territorial boundary, Indonesian's recurrent forest fires that resulted in the choking haze over the peninsula for over a decade since the mid-1990s, and the more thorny issues of human trafficking, Indonesian illegal migrants in Malaysia, and the mistreatment of Indonesian labour in Malaysia (Vatsikopoulos 2006; *Kompas* 2007b). Despite the geographical, linguistic, religious and cultural similarities between the two neighbouring countries, it is puzzling to see how few public and scholarly discussions there have been on and by people of the two countries (Alatas 1997: 150; Heryanto and Mandal 2003: 11–14; Noor 2005). Such mutual ignorance and long-standing lack of interest are distinct from, and harder to explain than, the common suspicion or hostility between neighbours that has characterized the Malaysia–Singapore, Singapore–Indonesia, and Indonesia–Australia relationships.

The unintended service performed by pop artists in mitigating political tensions between Malaysia and Indonesia can also be seen in reverse, with the female Malaysian singer Siti Nurhaliza being much adored in Indonesia. At the height of political tension between Indonesia and Malaysia over the territorial border near Ambalat Island in 2005, ultra-nationalists in Indonesia proposed a major military offensive measure against its neighbouring country. Some Indonesians took to the streets to galvanize public support for their rage towards Malaysia with shouting and banners invoking the 1963 confrontation slogan, with novel qualifications: '*Ganyang Malaysia–Selamatkan Siti Nurhaliza*!' (Crush Malaysia–But Save Siti Nurhaliza!) and 'Siti Yes, Malaysia No' (Noor 2005). The ability of these non-state sponsored and commercially driven pop artists to win the hearts and minds of tens of thousands (perhaps millions) of Indonesians and Malaysians, and to transcend political animosity, makes the state-sponsored cultural events under the rubric of the ASEAN Arts Festival in Kuala Lumpur on 18 October 2003 (*Kompas* 2003k) pale into insignificance.

Another comparison is useful, this time with Indonesia–East Timor relations. A decade before Peterpan charmed Malaysian audiences, the journalist-turned-short story writer Seno Gumira Ajidarma attracted the attention of many Indonesians and outside observers alike for taking the innovative and politically risky step of bridging the gap (or breaking the silence, if an aural metaphor is more apt than a temporal/spatial one) that had separated the Indonesian public from the East Timorese people during the Indonesian occupation. In the mid-1990s, Seno Gumira Ajidarma declared his now well-known dictum '*Ketika Jurnalisme Dibungkam*, *Sastra Harus Bicara*' (When Journalism is silenced, literature must speak up) (see Ajidarma 1997, 1999). This refers to his politically engaged literary activities in response to his removal from the chief editorship of the weekly newsmagazine *Jakarta-Jakarta*, following the angry reaction of the Indonesian military to a series of graphic reports in his magazine of the Dili incident

where Indonesian troops gunned down young East Timorese in a peaceful rally on 12 November 1991 (see Heryanto and Adi 2002: 62; Heryanto 2007: 531). The impact of the Dili incident and its media coverage is comparable with that of the Soweto incident in Apartheid South Africa in 1976 (Risse and Ropp 1999: 252). As he gradually receded from journalism, Ajidarma became increasingly prolific as a writer of short stories set in a violence-stricken unnamed place, depicting the plight of people in an anonymous – yet highly identifiable – land (i.e. East Timor). Journalistic materials that were available but could not be published under the severe censorship of the time provided raw material for his fiction.

What remains unclear is the extent to which East Timorese themselves had access to Ajidarma's writings, and whether they could identify with the characters in his politically charged stories. In contrast, the blatantly apolitical Peterpan 'rocked' East Timorese, who had barely recovered from the trauma of the political violence during Indonesian occupation, particularly the infamous scorched-earth measures that followed Indonesia's humiliating defeat in the UN-sponsored referendum for independence in 1999. On 13 November 2005, Peterpan thrilled an audience of 60,000 in Dili, the capital city of Timor Leste. President Xanana Gusmao personally welcomed these young Indonesian musicians (*detikHot* 2005). A former student of mine, Luke Arnold, who was present at the performance, described what he saw with amazement:

> Almost every young person in town rocked up. People were climbing up phone towers and jumping over the stadium fences just to get a view. It seemed like civil order was about to break down, but this time it had nothing to do with independence struggles. Only five years or so after their independence, people were literally falling over each other to see a band from the country they had separated from. It felt like a moment of reconciliation. The woman next to me said: 'we actually love Indonesians, we just hate their military'.
>
> (Arnold 2006: 3)

For many reasons the political, moral, and ideological power of pop cultures has been received with ambivalence at best and underestimated at worst across the globe. Some of these reasons are more familiar than others. Most often this power has escaped the attention of scholarly investigation in general, including Indonesian studies. On the few occasions when scholars make mention of pop culture, it tends to be dismissed or misunderstood. This book is one of the growing number of recent attempts by scholars of Indonesia to redress the imbalance, and this first chapter aims to show some of the reasons why this endeavour constitutes an important contribution to any serious study of contemporary Indonesia and, indeed, Asia more generally.

This, and most of the subsequent chapters, underscore the importance of the study of pop culture far beyond what has been commonly recognized,

and these chapters raise certain methodological issues in studying the subject matter. Being understudied, pop culture has often been misunderstood, overlooked, or dismissed by many students of Indonesia, resulting in a serious intellectual gap in the study of the country as a whole. This chapter will examine what may at first look like a debate about popular entertainment, and it will show that the sustainability of Indonesia as a plural nation-state is very much at stake in this debate. Popular culture in this example is important, not simply for whatever it informs us about something else more important, such as national politics. The two are inseparable. The debate from popular culture practices to be examined below is at the very heart of Indonesian national politics today.

This chapter will specifically discuss two methodological issues. First, it is necessary for a study of pop culture to go beyond close reading of a particular work of pop culture. Neither is it sufficient to measure quantitatively its production and consumption. In some cases, as illustrated in this chapter, a serious consideration of the broader social, historical, and political contexts of any particular production or consumption of culture is imperative, not merely optional, to the investigation. In this chapter, I will argue that the contest of four major ideological forces (Javanism, Islam, liberalism, and Marxism) has fundamentally dictated the parameters of Indonesian nation-state building, and framed the debates in the production and consumption of pop culture. As will be elaborated below, I contend that the Inul controversy is a product of a specifically historical moment; it might not have taken place had Inul been born a generation earlier.

Second, this chapter illustrates how ethnographic field work can prove to be significantly instrumental as method of data collection in the study of pop culture. Although this is neither an original nor novel proposition, existing literature shows that this standard approach in anthropology has not been widely adopted or adequately appreciated in the study of Indonesian pop culture, and most likely elsewhere. The reason may be that of convenience. Many products of pop culture are widely available as mass-produced items for sale in shopping areas. It is easy for many researchers to restrict their material for analysis primarily, if not exclusively, to a copy of such items. In contrast, this chapter will show that many aspects of Inul's unique strengths and sudden popularity in 2003 cannot be discerned unless one's research includes field work in selected areas where she made her early career and witnessed some of the events there. These aspects include her unusual use of Javanese language in interaction with her audience and in comparison with other performers of the same genre, as well as the use of digital technology by the urban under-class that has usually escaped the attention of middle-class scholars and other cultural analysts.

Pop culture's often close and unashamed association with crude profit-making in the entertainment industry has made it difficult for it to gain respectable status among elites of otherwise varied political outlook. For this reason, the pejorative term 'mass culture' has occasionally been used to

describe it (Strinati 1995: 10; Macdonald 1998: 22). The term 'represents a debased, trivialized, superficial, artificial and standardized culture' (Strinati 1995: 21). As noted by many (for a recent analysis of Indonesia see Hobart 2006), there is often a general concern that:

> the consumption of popular culture by the general population has always been a problem for 'other people', be they intellectuals, political leaders or moral and social reformers. These 'other people' have often held the view that this population should ideally be occupied with something more enlightening or worthwhile than popular culture.
>
> (Strinati 1995: 41)

At the same time, the obvious power of top artists to seduce the majority of populations across the globe has made it difficult for business people, politicians and other professions to ignore popular culture if they want to be – or be seen to be – relevant, attractive, and up to date in the eyes of society at large, and particularly of their immediate constituents. Although Indonesian voters have not elected a movie star as head of state, as in the case of former Presidents Ronald Reagan of the USA (1981–89) or Joseph Estrada of the Philippines (1998–2001), presidential candidates in post-authoritarian elections have done all they can to woo the masses by demonstrating their sympathy for pop culture. The current president, Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (also known as SBY), went so far as singing to the public during the election campaigns, and in the finalist session of the Indonesian Idol contest (see Chapter 6; and Lindsay 2005). In the lead-up to the Australian election campaign, Australian Prime Minister John Howard posted a clip on youtube online (Gilchrist 2007; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2007).[1]

But the significance of pop culture in contemporary Indonesia is never confined to the views and behaviour of the nation's political elite. As is perhaps also the case in neighbouring countries, no other social institution in Indonesia has arrested public attention on the scale or with the intensity of the electronic media, especially television. Nothing has attracted the number of hours of attention on a daily basis from around 100,000,000 Indonesians as television programs. This alone warrants special investigation. Without it, any understanding of contemporary Indonesia would be seriously flawed. But there are even stronger reasons why such a study is urgently needed. While Indonesia has barely recovered from a decade of the economic and political crisis that began in 1997, its contemporary cultures (pop or otherwise) have been thriving as never before.

When the novels *Saman* by Ayu Utami (1998), and *Supernova* by Dewi Lestari (2000) were published, many literary critics and students of literature were stunned by their innovative and literary quality (see Clark 1999; Hatley 1999). Subsequently, more works of comparable quality by other young, and predominantly female, writers have been published. Since 2000, contemporary pop music has achieved sales figures that would have been

unimaginable even a few years ago. Peterpan is neither the first nor the sole success story. On a smaller scale in commercial terms is the unprecedented growth of underground music (Wallach 2003; Bodden 2005). Moreover, a decade after the demise of the Indonesian film industry, and in the context of disdain for domestic films over a much longer period,[2] new titles from a new generation of film makers began to break new ground aesthetically, and to break commercial records, superseding the popularity of top Hollywood titles (Grayling 2002; van Heeren 2002b). Licensed presses have multiplied threefold since 1998, the number of commercial television networks has doubled, and over 50 new local television networks have been established (Heryanto and Hadiz 2005: 256–57). The media industry was the only industry in the country whose job market expanded in the wake of the 1998 economic crisis (Heryanto and Adi 2002) when millions of others lost jobs.

Despite all these developments, barely a single book in English on the phenomenon has been published, with Sen and Hill (2000) being an exception, although their work focuses more on the mass media than on pop cultures. English-language studies of Indonesian pop cultures are few and far between, and most focus on the New Order period. With a few important exceptions (Sen 1988; Heider 1991; Lockhard 1998; Kitley 2000), they have appeared in journal articles (e.g. Kleden 1977; Frederick 1982; Warren 1990; Zurbuchen 1990; Murray 1991; Henschkel 1994; Nilan 2000, 2001, 2003; Baulch 2002a, b; Barendregt and van Zanten 2002; Hobart and Fox 2006) or book chapters (Lent 1995). Incomplete or unpublished theses and conference papers promise to make a difference in the future. At the time this book went to press, there appeared to be not much more than scattered journal articles and book chapters dealing with fragments of the phenomenon. Three reasons may be offered to account for the dearth of serious analysis of Indonesian pop culture: (a) the newness of its prominence in public; (b) the dominance of certain paradigms in the study of this society; and (c) the prevailing masculine bias in our scholarship more generally. Let me say a little bit more about each of these.

First, pop culture is, by default, a product of an industrialized society, where both the signifying practices and their observable products (i.e. culture) are produced or performed in a great number, often with the assistance of technologies of mass-production, distribution and duplication, making them highly accessible to the populace. Although Indonesian industrialization dates back more than 100 years, it is fair to say that sustained industrial expansion took place significantly only in the 1980s, at the height of the militarist rule of the New Order government (1966–98), an intimate partner of the Western bloc during the Cold War. Although pop culture was a topic of public debate in the 1970s among Indonesia's intelligentsia, the lack of any in-depth study of Indonesia's pop culture in stark comparison with the study of other aspects of modern Indonesia is a testimony to the novelty of this genre. The situation in Indonesia's neighbouring countries is not very different. Even in those countries where industrialization began

slightly earlier or proceeded more robustly, pop culture is a fairly new phenomenon, and its study has just begun.

Second, there are internal problems with the study of Indonesian society in general, where the intellectual framework has been fixed too much for too long on nation-state building and modernization (McVey 1995; Heryanto 2005, 2006c; Bonura and Sears 2007), or the impediments to them (militarism, human rights abuse, rampant corruption, violent ethno-religious conflicts, and, lately, Islamist militants) at the expense of other issues of importance, and more enjoyable to millions of ordinary people.

This second set of problems in the study of Indonesia is closely related to a third, namely the masculine bias (see Pambudy 2003). As is the case globally (for a broader review see O'Connor and Klaus 2000: 379–82), the material aspects of, and the conceptual issues surrounding, modernization, nation-state building, the economy, religion, war or corruption are all seen as primarily activities about and for men. These issues are considered essentially masculine and of public importance. In contrast, in both real-life and scholarship, the other and devalued gender is relegated to the secondary 'private', or 'domestic sphere, which is also the main sphere of mass-mediated (radio, television) leisure, entertainment, and pop culture. There follows a familiar, if deeply problematic, sense of division between the masculine world news and the feminine soap operas, or between serious newsmagazines and so-called women's magazines.

Most observers of Indonesian culture devote attention to so-called traditional or ethnic cultures (often exoticized by many studies to be authentic cultures of the people), the state-sanctioned 'official' version of national cultures (as often propagated in schools and ceremonies), or the 'avant-garde' or 'high' cultures of the nation's intelligentsia (as found in the academy, theatres and prestigious galleries). These categories are helpful for conceptualizing what we mean by 'pop culture', by highlighting what it is not.

Admittedly, there are many and equally valid concepts of 'popular cultures' (Strinati 1995; Storey 2006). In this book, and particularly in this chapter, the term refers to a variety of genres of widely circulated communicative practices prominently for a large number of 'ordinary' people, or by such people, or a combination of both. The first category (for the people) refers to mass-produced commodified messages (including music, films, and television) and related signifying practices. The second category (by the people) includes non-industrialized, relatively independent, communicative practices that circulate through various means (public events, parades, festivals), often, but not always, in opposition or alternative to the mass-produced commodities of entertainment and lifestyles.

This is not to say that there is no borrowing or mutation of particular elements between one category and the other. Any in-depth analysis of pop culture requires a reference to these other genres. While studies on all the other categories of cultures abound, in-depth study of Indonesian popular cultures has barely begun. At the core of the object of study is the

communicative practice ('culture') of, to, or by ordinary people, in the sense of those who are 'neither members of the philosophical, aesthetic, or political elites, nor ... of the new proletariat or under-classes' (Kahn 2001:19).

While pop culture provides a resource-rich venue for the study of various aspects of contemporary society, the politics of identity in the production and consumption of popular culture will be the focus of this book for very specific historical reasons to be elaborated below. In particular, this chapter is devoted to outlining the most important changes in the relationship between Indonesian politics in the broadest senses of the term and its pop cultures over the past 20 or 30 years. This chapter aims to provide the necessary historical context for the issues discussed in subsequent chapters.

Producers of pop culture do not always convey political value or messages in their work, and consumers of this work do not necessarily seek such value or messages. Pop cultures are often meant primarily to be objects of entertainment and commodity for profit, although there are cases where cultures (pop or otherwise) are overtly designed to make political statements, and may be celebrated, or banned, as such. As will be elaborated in a moment, the music of Rhoma Irama in the 1970s and 1980s (Frederick 1982), the music of Iwan Fals in the 1980s and 1990s (Murray 1991) and the theatrical productions of Teater Koma (Zurbuchen 1990) are some of the best-known examples. But in the past three decades, even what might initially have been intended to be purely entertainment often acquired political values as it circulated in public, and as it was received as such by the larger audience, occasionally on a scale larger than anyone could have expected. As will be examined in detail below, the case of singer–dancer Inul Daratista is one of the latest and most controversial examples of this phenomenon.

Given Indonesia's highly politicized environment, it barely needs explanation why it is not possible for arts and cultures to be exempted from political contestation in the society at large. One argument that will be developed in this chapter refers to the important political shifts in the production and consumption of pop cultures since the ideological crisis of the New Order, which preceded by several years its formal demise in 1998. Until the mid-1980s the New Order's authoritarian government was at centre stage of Indonesian public life. The political dynamics in the production and consumption of pop cultures was then caught in the polarity between those for, and those against, the status quo centred at the official ideology of the regime, which was a combination of Javanism, secularism, militarism, developmentalism, and indigenism (more in the next section). It must be noted that the fall of the New Order in 1998 did not entail a total break with all these orientations, dispositions, outlooks, structures of feelings, and social relations. Nonetheless, although their legacies persist, these elements are no longer as unified and dominant as they once were, while new and renewed forces have come into play, making the whole political constellation a new and contested field and with no centre of power to consolidate domination as yet.

In many ways, post-1998 Indonesia is reminiscent of the country in the 1950s when it enjoyed its first decade of formal independence. In both periods, Indonesia tried to rebuild a modern, sovereign, and respectable nation-state, following the demise of a long-running repressive government (colonial Dutch rule before 1945, and the New Order government from 1966 to 1998). In both periods, the project proved to be much more difficult than its proponents and supporters had initially anticipated. One of the fundamental reasons for this difficulty is the diversity and seeming incompatibility of the major social forces that constitute Indonesia. To understand these problems in greater detail, and to understand the space for pop cultures in both expressing and negotiating these political contestation, we need to step back several decades and gain a broader historical view of the incomplete project of Indonesia-making.

Major Political Identities

It has been said many times that Indonesia is a country of extremely diverse cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and traditions. An in-depth discussion of any selected parts of the nation's cultures or history would necessarily require some sort of reduction of the other aspects of the country's complexity. What should never be reduced or overlooked in our analysis, however, are the fascinating blends and dangerous tensions among the four major forces that make the foundation or backbone of Indonesia. One of these can generally be understood as the many vernacular 'traditions' in the archipelago, of which what has been conveniently called Javanese has appeared to be most salient. The other three forces are identified as exogenous and distinctively 'modern'. A brief elaboration of these four major forces will be useful.

Students of Indonesian cultures in the past three or four decades have deconstructed, or at least problematized, notions of local cultures as something pristine, authentic, essential, or indigenous. Many of these local traditions have a long history of change and interaction with one another. They have also interacted with and adopted elements from other traditions that have travelled across the globe. In several parts of Indonesia's archipelago, Hinduism and Buddhism have been embraced with varying forms and scales of modifications, giving new life to the traditions of the local ancestors (see Chalmers 2006: esp. Ch. 2, 4). What has come to be known variably as 'Javanese' culture, Javanism, or Javanist mysticism, are but salient examples of such assimilated traditions. The prominence of Javanism has to do with several factors, including the numerical size and the power of its followers in the formation of the nation-state (often at the expense of other traditions, especially in the eastern islands of the archipelago), and the contribution of colonial and post-colonial scholarship to the discourse of the subject. Even here, the reference to 'Javanese' culture or Javanism is just a convenient but deeply problematic shorthand for something more complex that has long been problematized and debated by its analysts, especially since Clifford

Geertz's classic study (1964; see also Pemberton 1994). Javaneseness (whatever it may mean) is never one and the same thing for the long-term residents of the island of Java, including those who have been identified or self-identify as ethnically Javanese, and members of the sub-ethnic groups.

Of the three modernizing forces that have helped shape Indonesia,[3] Islam was the earliest to arrive in the archipelago. The other two are various streams of thoughts inspired by liberalism and Marxism respectively. But it is never easy to know how these should be labelled. The term 'developmentalists' has sometimes been used to refer to those who have strongly identified themselves with the basic tenets of liberalism in the past and present. Confusing as they may be, terms like 'leftist' or 'populist' are often used conveniently to refer to those people who show marked sympathy or affinity with Marxian tenets, or have at least shown the influence of Marxian thought and orientation. It barely needs emphasizing that there are more than a few derivatives, variants of, and names for each of these three moral, intellectual, and ideological orientations. Also obvious in the discussion on these three modernizing forces, is their portrayal as ideal types. In reality, the distinctions among the four identified forces are much harder to draw, and this is further compounded by the interventions of other factors that cut across these categories (including class, gender, or ethnicity). Like everyone else, Indonesians have more than one identity, and show some elements of their identity more strongly than others.

In the history of Indonesia the proponents of the above major forces have had moments of mutual respect, but more often of mutual suspicion and contempt. Notwithstanding these less amicable relationships, some of the strongly committed proponents of the three forces distinguish themselves from the first mentioned socio-cultural force by their commitment to what we can call 'modernity'. Here 'modernity' is understood as including several of the following characteristics: aspiration to and an optimism for the idea of the progress of history; the need to break with the past; a conviction and celebration of the central role of human agency (as opposed to preordained fate, destiny or other supernatural forces); a conception of humans as basically equal and rationally capable beings for bringing about such progress in history; and a fundamental reliance on largely secular, or at least non-metaphysical, understandings and a mastery of science and technology, practice of law, and shared moral values.[4]

In one sense, the success of Indonesian nation-building can be understood in terms of successfully managing these four major forces. Although these forces have co-existed or blended in heterogeneous and changing composites for at least a century, their relationships have also been characterized by profound tension or centripetal tendencies by default, rather than mutual respect and desire. At times, such tension has erupted into violent conflict. Such a situation is by no means unique to any modern nation-states. What distinguishes Indonesia from some of its more 'stable' neighbours (including the strongly Islamic Malaysia and Brunei, Buddhist

Thailand, or secular and developmentalist Singapore) is the fairly balanced distribution of power among these four major forces, making the struggle for a position of dominance among them a long-lasting one. Temporary peace and stability occur when one central power dominates all others, as during the periods of colonial rule and the New Order government. Both regimes were strongly developmentalist in outlook, anti-Islam, and anti-communist. Conversely, it has been easy for some of these major forces to collaborate and suppress their fundamental differences when they face a common enemy (as during the formation of opposition to Dutch colonial rule, and New Order militarist authoritarianism).

The ongoing tension between these forces permeates nearly all aspects of Indonesian life all the time. However, given the raw sensitivities, these tensions and the threat of violence are not always visible. Indonesia's pop cultures are created and consumed within such contexts. One of the subtle, but nonetheless foregrounded, expressions of this tension, can be seen in the film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* (Goodbye Jeanette), released at the height of New Order rule, as instructively analysed by Keith Foulcher (1990). A more explicit illustration of a political battle in pop culture found expression in the debut of the *dangdut* singer and dancer Inul Daratista, soon after the New Order's demise and during the years of Indonesia's democratization. This was a period characterized by the absence of a single social force enjoying the privileged position of unchallenged domination at the top of the political structure. We shall now turn our attention to these two cases in the next two sections.

Negotiating Indonesia-ness under the New Order

The commercially successful 1987 film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* was clearly intended primarily as entertainment.[5] I saw this film as an undergraduate student during its initial release in Indonesia. Foulcher's (1990) critical and considered analysis brought back my own memories of the film, and persuaded me to see it in a very different light. Foulcher refers to the film as a case of the state's hegemonic power in allowing non-state agents to create fictional narrative with some sense of liberty, although the act of producing and consuming this narrative is never autonomous. Although it is no longer fashionable to say this, one can argue that those involved in the production of the film and its consumption indirectly (and most likely unconsciously) were taking part in reproducing the dominant ideology of the time. Foulcher (1990: 306–9) re-narrates the storyline better than I can, but below is a brief summary that should serve the purpose of our discussion.

The film tells a love story involving Suryono, a male Javanese artist from a *priyayi* (middle-ranking aristocratic) family, and two women. The first is his French wife, Jeanette; the second is Trima, a house-maid in the house of Suryono's mother in the city of Solo (one of the two major centres of high Javanese court cultures, the other being Yogyakarta). For most of the story,

Suryono and his wife live in his mother's house. Jeanette and Trima are presented as polar opposites. Jeanette is highly animated, independently minded, confident, and thoroughly if not excessively 'modern'. Following the stereotypes of the 'liberal' West so common in Asia, Jeanette is presented as a woman from a rich family, who has in the past fallen victim to drugs, and then went to Indonesia to seek spiritual and emotional tranquillity. In contrast, Trima is a peasant girl, who has no school education. She is noticeably timid, especially in showing her secret passion for the married son of her employer-cum-patron. When their marriage breaks down, Jeanette leaves Suryono and returns to Europe. After some time, Suryono rapes Trima and she becomes pregnant. To cover the shame, Trima resigns from work and returns to her village with a false story about a thief having raped her.

Actually there is another important woman in the story, Suryono's mother. Her deceased husband left her with painful memories of their marriage as he was unfaithful to her. With Suryono her only child, and only next of kin, she is strongly attached to him, and she hopes that he will not repeat his father's infidelity. Until near the end of the film, Suryono's mother does not approve of his marrying a Westerner. Obviously she would not expect her son to have any serious relationships with Trima, the servant. From the *priyayi* perspective of Suryono's mother, Trima's pregnancy out of wedlock simply confirms her conviction of the low character of low-class Javanese peasant folk.

In a remarkable parallel to those forces that have made Indonesia today as outlined above, the relations between Suryono and these three women resemble Indonesia's perception of a much desired, but also intimidating, West (Jeanette); of vernacular traditions whose qualities of innocence, purity, and sincerity seem exploitable and disposable (Trima); and of modern day *priyayi* Java (Suryono's mother) as the foundation and antecedent of the existence of the Indonesian nation-state (Suryono himself). It is also clear that the masculine nation-state wishes to distinguish itself from others by virtue of having some power and desire to dominate the other three figures, all significantly females. The intention to unite them all under one domination is never a total success in the film, as in the case of Indonesia's nation-building. Near the end of the story, Suryono marries Trima. Jeanette returns to Solo with a baby (Suryono's son) to learn the truth about Suryono. She decides not to reunite with her husband, but manages to reconcile with her mother-in-law thanks to the new-born baby. Both women have been disappointed by their respective husbands. They also share a disappointment with one man, the film's male protagonist.

To go beyond Foulcher's analysis, for the purpose of this chapter, readers will notice that two of Indonesia's major forces are absent from *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette*. There are no elements with identifiable orientations towards Islam, or with the Marxian positions. It is well documented, the Indonesian Left has been banned since 1965, its proponents and sympathizers

were murdered, prosecuted, or exiled without trial for 10 years or more. The survivors and their relatives have been systematically stigmatized to this day.[6] Segments within the more Islam-based social organizations (but also minority Christians) took part in the anti-Left wave of killings and subsequent witch-hunt. However, before long, these politicized Islam groups were themselves suppressed by the new militarist government that they had helped to seize state power. Many key Islamic political leaders were put in jail, and all Islamist politics was severely restricted. The suppression of political Islam lasted for at least 20 years, ironically marking a period of strongly anti-Muslim politics over an extended period in the world's largest Muslim nation (see TAPOL 1987).

During this time, Rhoma Irama became an important pop star, the first one with an explicitly Islamic identity. The lyrics of his music contain references to Islam and stinging social criticism of the status quo. Musically, Rhoma Irama devoted himself entirely to *dangdut* (a mix of Malay, Indian, and Arabic musical elements), until then considered markedly low-class, irrevocably crude, and artistically distasteful.[7] Equipping himself with Western musical instruments, and inspired by contemporary Western pop music, Rhoma Irama created a whole new history of *dangdut* music, and indeed of Indonesian pop culture (Frederick 1982; Lockhard 1998: 94–105). It was his later association with an Islamic political party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Development Unity Party), more than his choice of musical genre or the social criticism in his lyrics, that provoked the government's harsh reaction. *Dangdut* was then banned in the then sole (state-owned) television network (TVRI) and many radio stations. Ironically, the suppression and stigmatization of *dangdut* only made it into a new icon of political opposition among the burgeoning middle-class in Indonesian cities. A decade or so later, in another major twist of history, no political party (not even the government's Golkar party) can afford not to use *dangdut* during the election campaigns. The political history of *dangdut*, as well as Rhoma Irama's position in it, altered dramatically again after the fall of the New Order in 1998. Before we examine this further in the next section, it is necessary to return to our discussion of the relationship between Islam, politics, and the New Order government.

The New Order government's attitude to Islam began to change in the late 1980s, but political Islam gained its momentum in 1990, when the then aging President Suharto made a series of political moves over a short period of time.[8] Suharto freed Muslim political leaders from prisons before their release dates, while courtrooms in several cities tried people being charged with making public statements that were deemed disrespectful of Islam. Suharto courted a wide range of Islamic groups, including their more radical elements, as part of his attempt to build new alliances and maintain his grip on state power in the face of a divided military that had until then become his main support base. In the same year, he decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time, becoming a *hajj* in his political twilight.

He rescinded the ban on the veiling of Muslim school girls. His eldest daughter began to wear a veil at all her public appearances. The number of mosques increased significantly. The government restriction of new permits for the publication of newspapers was suspended, with the launch of the first explicitly Islamic newspaper *Republika*, affiliated with the new national Islam organization ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, Association of Indonesia Muslim Intellectuals).

Elsewhere I have discussed in more detail the emergence of the 'new' Muslim in tandem with the early consolidation of a new bourgeois class from approximately the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (Heryanto 1999: 173–76). Major bookshops began to create special spaces for Islamic books. During Ramadhan, fancy restaurants and major shopping malls were busy with Muslim families celebrating the holy events. Some five-star hotels held annual fashion shows of Islamic women's clothing. The entertainment industry and organizers of pop culture events did not miss the opportunity to take advantage of the new climate, redefining what would sell. It became 'cool' to be a (new) Muslim, leading to a trend that Murray (1991) refers to as radical 'Islamic chic'. In sum, I highlighted the dramatic change in Muslim identity at the time in the following terms:

> Gone are the old and rigid meanings of 'religion' and 'politics', as well as the clear boundaries that separate them from 'lifestyle'. In today's Islam in Indonesia, old familiar images have been replaced by new ones. The associations of Islam with rural poverty, religious dogmatism, the Middle East, anti-Chinese, anti-West sentiments, and fundamentalists seeking to establish an Islamic state, are juxtaposed with new images. Now Islam is also associated with television talk shows, [business] cards with PhDs from prominent Western schools, erudite intellectual debates, mobile phones and consumption of *ketupat* during Ramadhan at McDonald's.
>
> (Heryanto 1999: 176)

A decade later, some of the practices have become normalized, some have expanded even further or intensified, while others have moderated, partly as the so-called war on terror intervened and complicated matters.

In the 1990s, as an executive with the power to appoint members of parliament, Suharto made the composition of the law-makers significantly 'greener' as the locals called it (referring to the colour of the then Islamic party's flag). It was definitely 'greener' than at any other time in Indonesian history and 'greener' than anyone could have expected or imagined. The same was true of positions in the state cabinet and military. This rapidly trickled down to nearly all of state administrative appointments at lower levels in the provinces away from the capital city of Jakarta. For more than a few observers, this constituted one of the fundamental roots of what then developed into the series of protracted inter-ethnic, and inter-religious wars

on several islands in Indonesia at turn of the century (see e.g. Bertrand 2001; van Klinken 2001). Not all Islamic organizations and their leaders enjoyed or supported the changes initiated by Suharto. The more independently minded Muslims became seriously concerned with the politization of religion, and argued for the pursuance of a more pluralist, liberal, and inclusive democracy. During Suharto's last years in power, such pluralist Muslims and their organizations were systematically marginalized or intimidated. Ironically, this repressive measure galvanized public discontent in the build-up of a new wave of democratization that ushered in the fall of the New Order in 1998.

Inulmania: Testing Indonesia's Islamization

Nothing has articulated the fierce and ideologically laden contestation of the four major forces in contemporary Indonesia more vividly than the 2003 controversy over the performance of the *dangdut* singer–dancer Inul Daratista. Two years later Indonesia was further divided by the proposal of an anti-pornography law from the more Islamist inclined parties inside the parliament and supported by many outside it. Many see 'Inulmania' and the failure to repress Inul being one main impetus to this new bill, and that the moves to repress Inul and then to propose the new law are parts of concerted efforts by the Islamist politicians and social organizations to Islamicize Indonesian state (Hosen 2005; Allen 2007). At stake in what may look like a debate about a popular entertainment or pornography is no less than the cohesion and survival of the world's fourth most populous nation.

If the rise of Rhoma Irama, as shown earlier, can be seen in tandem with the resistance of political Islam to the New Order and a herald of Indonesia's new Islamization, Inul's rise to prominence complicated that trend. Another contrast is worth noting here. Rhoma Irama's music came to the fore with strong political messages. By asserting a new identity politics and moral correctness, he risked serious consequences from the militarist state, and actually paid dearly. Inul Daratista's performance had no such political agenda. Celebrating the bodily pleasures of singing and dancing, she made no political statement. Nonetheless, her performances were received differently, rapidly provoking a series of comments and counter-comments with strong political overtones, first at the local level but increasingly moving to the centre of national politics.

Inul (as she is popularly known) was born on 21 January 1979 as Ainur Rokhimah, the first of the six children of Abdullah Aman and Rufia, in the small town of Gempol, East Java. Her change of name from a markedly Arabic and Islamic sounding name to a Javanized Indonesian one on the eve of her successful debut is testament to the dramatic change in her life and status. She began her career as a rock singer in high school, before performing at several major hotels in Surabaya, the provincial capital city of East Java. Feeling that she would never succeed in the business of singing

rock, she shifted in 1991 to concentrate her energy on *dangdut*, whose fans had until then come mainly from the rural population and urban underclass. Before 2000, she had already had the privilege of performing in Japan at the invitation of the Indonesian Consulate-General in Osaka (Bajuri 2002). Subsequently, she performed in several other countries including Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia, Korea, the Netherlands, and the USA (*Bintang Indonesia* 2003). But in her homeland until mid-2002, she was little known outside small towns in East and Central Java. Soon afterwards, she transformed herself and was transformed by a series of historical conditions, becoming a new icon of pop culture well beyond anyone's imagination, including her own.

As a secondary-school student in the 1980s she was paid Rp. 3,500 (roughly US$2 then, but equivalent to US$0.30 in 2003) to perform (*Bintang Indonesia* 2003; Nurbianto 2003; *Kompas* 2003c). A decade later she was making Rp. 10,000–15,000 (roughly US$4–6) for performing at weddings, circumcisions, or local festivals (Susanti 2002; Djunaedi 2003). By early 2003, her monthly income reportedly reached Rp. 700,000,000 (roughly US$78,500) (Abhiseka 2003), or Rp. 60,000,000 (US$ 6,200) per show (Mustafa *et al.* 2003; Nurbianto 2003),[9] making her one of the richest artists in the country during the protracted economic crisis. This revenue came mainly from her various major television appearances. For one 60-minute show in 2003, one station reaped as much as Rp. 900,000,000 (roughly US$92,000) from advertisers (LIN 2003).[10]

Before 2003, Inul made several album recordings, including *Two In One* (English original), *Kepiye Mas* (Javanese 'What's Up, Brother?'), *Pacar Asli* (True Lover), *Cinta Suci* (Sacred Love), and *Mbah Dukun* (Mr. Dukun – a traditional healer). None attained any significant success. Her rise to fame in 2003 was to a great extent thanks to the then underestimated power of the new digital technology among the urban under-class. The significance of this new medium deserves further discussion, and I will return to it towards the end of this section. For now, let me focus on the scale of the distribution of her recording as a way of illustrating her fame, and then discuss the significance of the ensuing controversy over her allegedly indecent style of performance.

It is not easy to assess the total volume of the circulated recordings of Inul's performances on an estimated 15 different VCDs.[11] Estimates range widely between 3,000,000 (Walsh 2003) and 6,000,000 (see Anom 2003) or even 10,000,000 copies as suggested by local observers in East Java where I conducted field work in early 2003. This achievement was unprecedented, as the highest sales figures for *dangdut* had been 500,000 (Anom 2003), and this remained unrivalled at the time of writing in 2007. The largest sales figures of any Indonesian music recording – including that by Peterpan, and many others before them such as Sheila On 7, Padi, Dewa, Jamrud, and Slank – was slightly over 1,000,000 copies (see Mustafa *et al.* 2003). Inul was one of the first and few Indonesians to have been covered by *Time Asia*, where her debut was described in the following terms:

> Virtually overnight, Inulmania swept Indonesia, and within weeks, Inul was bumping and grinding on the cover of major national magazines and appearing on television more often than the country's President. . . . TV programs in which she appeared consistently drew 14 share points, well above the norm for music shows.
>
> (Walsh 2003)

Inul reached people of all ages and from all walks of life. The respected English daily *The Jakarta Post* (2003c) reported the so-called Inul's pencil being 'the hottest-selling item in the capital' among schoolchildren. 'The pencil sways while in use, which is said to be similar to Inul's gyrating dance on stage'. A professor of physics from the prestigious University of Indonesia made an analysis of Inul's controversial movements to explain 'chaos theory' to a non-scholarly audience (Kebamoto 2003). Television companies competed with each other to maximize their share of Inul's time (see Atmowiloto 2003; Mustafa *et al.* 2003). So did major political parties, particularly the nationalist Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) and the inclusive Islamic Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (the Awakening Nation Party), in the wake of the 2004 general elections for parliament and the presidency (Nurbianto 2003).[12] Some compared the Inul controversy to controversies concerning Eminem (*Astaga* 2003; Walsh 2003), Madonna (Pambudy 2003), Michael Jackson (Kompas 2003g), or Elvis Presley (Aglionby 2003). During my field work in East Java in 2003, I repeatedly heard how crowds at *dangdut* concerts became impatient and demanding if Inul did not show up, or performed too little, or too late.

Controversy immediately followed Inul's rapid success. For the purpose of our analysis, it is useful to identify several distinct phases of the controversy. The first began with a series of bans by local governments and religious edicts from local Councils of Ulamas in early 2003, especially after Inul was discovered in late 2002 by a television industry that had been undergoing rapid expansion since 1999 (Heryanto and Adi 2002). The controversy entered a new phase in late April 2003, when Inul met Rhoma Irama (*Media Indonesia* 2003b; *Suara Merdeka* 2003c). The next one and a half months were anti-climactic, marked as they were by Inul's withdrawal from public appearance, only to be resurrected by a major television event in early June 2003. Not long after that the emotional controversy that split the nation, along with Inul's aura, seemed to dissipate. By 2004 her name was barely making the national news. This continued until April 2006 when some Islamist groups in Jakarta attacked her civil rights at the height of another nationwide controversy, this time over the new Anti-Pornography Bill. The story of Inul constitutes an important chapter in the history of Indonesian pop culture, and in the history of identity politics of the nation more broadly, especially in Java.

To her critics, Inul epitomizes the moral corruption and decadence of Indonesia, and of the global Western-styled modernity that Indonesia had adopted. Her unique style of dancing (called *ngebor* by locals, literally meaning 'drilling') fascinated many, and was an object of disgust for many others who saw it as being sexually vulgar. While there was really nothing new about such performances in as number of regions in Indonesia, including her own, and while she was neither the first nor the worst case in this profession, Inul's prominence in public consciousness took place at a particular moment that made it explosive. Her success provoked concerns among many morally conservative segments within society, among whom the Islamic groups and Council of Ulamas enjoyed the strongest power and authority in an increasingly Islamized Indonesia. The latter made the sharpest criticism, calling upon the Muslim-majority society to denounce any patronage of Inul's performance. It is not clear to what extent such a statement can be interpreted as an explicit and strict 'ban' by religious leaders, with which their followers had to comply. But the edict definitely carried significant authority and generated effective intimidation among many, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

In the first three months of 2003, several local governments issued declarations banning Inul from performing in their jurisdictions. These statements were often made in public with reference to, or in support of, earlier statements from regional Councils of Ulamas. It must be noted, however, that neither all local governments nor all Islamic groups were unanimous on this matter. Some even strongly welcomed Inul and her performance in their regions when others banned her.

It must also be remembered that this controversy was taking place just when the National Council of Ulamas had issued an edict of war against widespread pornography, and the nation had witnessed the growth of urban militias across the archipelago (see Chapter 2). Claiming to be representing and defending the honour of Islam, these militias took to the streets, yelling the standard cry '*Allahu Akbar*' (God is Great), donning Middle Eastern clothes, and attacking social groups and gatherings (such as human rights, labour, or gay activists) and public places that they considered *kafir* (infidel), morally corrupt, or anti-Islamic (such as prostitution, gambling, night entertainments, houses of worship with suspiciously deviant articles of faith or legal status, and restaurants that opened during the hours of fasting). In most cases, the perpetrators of these illegal acts of destruction of premises and of physical assaults enjoyed impunity for their actions.

Given the serious imbalance in the power struggle in the nation, in favour of those with Islamic credentials during this time, supporters of Inul wisely avoided any confrontation with the religious leaders, and their anti-Inul sentiments. Sympathy for Inul and broader concerns over freedom of expression only burst out when Rhoma Irama, the 'King of *Dangdut*', moved onto the scene, and took a leading role in a new anti-Inul movement. In April 2003,

speaking on behalf of PAMMI (Persatuan Artis Musik Melayu Indonesia, Malay Musicians Association of Indonesian), which he chaired, Rhoma Irama and many of his close associates denounced Inul and several other *dangdut* performers for having damaged the honour of *dangdut*, something he claimed he had built from scratch and had now been thrown back into a 'ditch' (Pradityo 2003). Rhoma Irama banned those performers from singing any songs composed by other members of the Association. On 24 April 2007, and reportedly under duress (Triono 2003), Inul came to see Rhoma Irama to apologize and resolve the dispute (*Suara Merdeka* 2003c). Instead of achieving reconciliation, the meeting aggravated relations between them, and prompted a major public backlash of public support for Inul. One major public figure who came to her defence was none other than the controversial former president Abdurrahman Wahid. Seeing this reaction, Rhoma Irama backed off from further confrontation. He came to see Wahid to 'clear any misunderstanding' (*Media Indonesia* 2003c), softened his stance towards Inul, and claimed to have been victimized by inaccurate media reports and the dirty tricks of a media industry that was reaping profit from indecent business (Shofiana 2003; *KCM* 2003).

Despite the formal resolution of the dispute with Rhoma Irama and his supporters, Inul chose to withdraw from public performance for over a month following the meeting with him. She seemed severely traumatized by the whole incident, and her temporary retreat helped ease the nationwide tension. But on 4 June 2003, she made a surprising come-back on a special program on the TransTV network, which was devoted specifically to her return into public. This time she appeared with a completely different persona: a combination of someone trying to give a professional smile without being able to hide a profound mental pain. The show also appeared to be a tool of promotion in the hands of top fashion designers; an object of political statements by Jakarta's liberals in response to the intimidation from Islamist groups; and simultaneously a newly inaugurated star under the sponsorship of a major corporation (more detail below). The show drew an overwhelmingly warm response from the public, so much so that the television network decided to re-broadcast a recording of the show for a second and third time at one-week intervals (11 and 18 June 2003) (*Kompas* 2003j). All was fine, except that this was also Inul's last major performance in Indonesia. She continued to perform, but with less frequency, thinning crowds, and less media coverage. Her huge popularity dissipated as rapidly as it had come.

With the Inul phenomenon now in the past, we have the opportunity to ask what this may tell us about contemporary Indonesia, particularly in relation to the dynamics of its popular culture. Two questions come to mind. First, did the Inul controversy represent more liberal trends in Indonesia, including in sexual matters, or did it represent new conservatism, or both? Second, can the controversy tell us anything of importance about Indonesia beyond issues of morality and decency as these were presented in public; and if so,

what? I will sum up my answers here, and then elaborate on them in the remainder of this chapter.

As suggested earlier, and contrary to appearances, the controversy about Inul has a lot more to do with Indonesia's identity politics than with issues of decency in relation to an individual artist. By Indonesian standards, Inul's eroticism was mild, but the ideological war of the major political forces in contemporary Indonesia was not. The controversy over Inul demonstrates a series of ideological contests. Crudely put, these contests involve the following pairs with some overlap among them, and complexities that cut across them: (a) local sentiment/national authority; (b) syncretic Javanism/new Islam piety; (c) patriarchy/the women's movement; (d) lower/upper-class cultural tastes; and (e) digital divide/empowerment. The remainder of this section will be devoted to elaborating each of these pairs.[13]

Journalist John Aglionby (2003) has described the Inul controversy in the *Guardian* as being on a 'completely higher plane than anything I've come across anywhere in the world since the death of Princess Diana'. The significance of the controversy can be appreciated historically, taking into account its immediate political contexts. As we have seen, militarism, Javanism, paternalism, nativism, and secularism enjoyed high status in the making of the official national identity for more than 30 years under the tight grip of the New Order government. During that period, the New Order government also vigorously propagated a set of 'communitarian' morals and ideological values under the rubric of *kekeluargaan* (literally 'family-ness', from *keluarga* 'family'). One can say that this is the Indonesian equivalent of the 'Asian Values' argument that was propagated in Malaysia, Singapore, and a few other Asian countries.[14] Under such a regime, sexual pleasure in what came to be called 'traditional' cultures was tolerated, Islamic piety was politically suspect as potentially subversive, but most importantly social hierarchy (male over female, senior over junior, social harmony over individual rights, urban over rural, nation over region) was strongly prescribed, and social conflict proscribed (Sen and Hill 2000: 141).

All of these elements came under serious challenge with the end of the New Order government in 1998. The central state, the military, Javanism, and male dominance all came under attack from various quarters. Although regionalism and the women's movements made impressive advances in national politics, only Islam of various political colours (including the violently inclined militias, the liberal, the moderate, and the exclusivists) has gained new and dominant authority. Contemporary Indonesia is marked by plurality, a multi-centred political orientation, and a fierce ideological battle for dominance in the nation, where Islamic groups have continued to have enjoyed stronger positions than any others since 1990 (see above). The popularity of Inul and the controversy that her success entailed were more directly attributable to this specific historical moment than anything in her dance movements *per se*.

It would have been difficult for Inul to enjoy the success she did had she been born 20 years earlier and had she grown up under the militarist regime during the Cold War period. To begin with, the digital technology that spurred Inul's debut did not yet exist. Various Javanese traditions of erotic dance were tolerated as long as they were practised mainly in rural towns and among the urban under-class, and did not penetrate the public imagination through the medium of the national television. Neither pious Islamist politicians (Inul's main opponent) nor Indonesian feminist activists (Inul's staunch supporters) were allowed to flourish during much of the New Order period.

Regional Pride/Capital Power

It is easy, especially for a distant observer, to see the whole saga of Inul as just another rags-to-riches story. But to do so would be to overlook the more important dimensions of Indonesian history that the incident has helped bring to the surface. I was lucky to be able to conduct field work in East Java in early 2003, allowing me to observe her rise to fame in ways otherwise inaccessible before she became an object of controversy. In most cases, her shows were held on poorly constructed stages with temporary metal poles, wooden or bamboo floor and stairs, and a plastic shelter. Her audience came to the open-air space on foot from their villages kilometres away to watch, dance, and cheer the much-adored performer. Their movement to the site several hours before the show's commencement, and their dispersal afterwards always created a scene in the heart of the towns hosting the show. The scene of such crowd on the move is comparable with that generated by a major soccer match, except Inul's crowd seemed to be predominantly rural people and the urban under-classes. It was not predominantly male, or aggressively rowdy like some soccer spectators.

From the beginning, two things in particular struck me about her: her ability to command authority during the entire show, and the strongly East Javanese-accented nature of her speech and style. To non-Javanese, there is often an assumption that Solo-Yogyakarta court-centred cultures represent Javaneseness (which, in turn, is often taken at a more distant level as an emblem of Indonesianness). This is to overlook the variations between these court cultures and those to be found at the western ends of Java (bordering with Sundanese ethnic cultures), the coastal Northern Javanese, and another set of Eastern Javanese variants which are strongly egalitarian. There is indeed a long history of mutual mockery between Central and Eastern Javanese: the former stereotyped as superficial, pompous, slow, and hierarchical versus the latter's coarseness, down-to-earth demeanour, and rowdiness. Inul demonstrated some of the latter's traits, at least in the years just before she became a national star. The nation's capital city of Jakarta also has many of the East Javanese characteristics combined with a strongly cosmopolitan outlook that East Java lacks. The sibling rivalry

between Jakarta and Surabaya (the nation's second-largest city, and second-largest industrial site) is reminiscent of those between Bangkok and Chiangmai, Beijing and Shianghai, or Sydney and Melbourne.

The Javanese language is markedly hierarchical. There are no neutral speech acts. *Krama* (high), *Madya* (medium), and *Ngoko* (low) are the most commonly known levels in that language, although linguists identify as many as nine levels. The art of switching between these levels is much more visible in the hierarchy-conscious Central Java than in Northern and Eastern Java, where the low level (*Ngoko*) is customary and acceptable in daily conversation among strangers in the markets and streets. With any given speech, one often has to take the position of a superior or inferior in relation to one's interlocutor, although one can switch levels at different moments in the course of a conversation. But the language does not allow a mix of levels within one sentence construction. As a norm, younger people speak in high Javanese to elders, children speak it to parents, subordinates to superiors, and wives to husbands, but not vice versa.

A speaker will usually address a mixed audience in high Javanese (*Krama*). When on stage, most pop music performers usually speak in Indonesian, the national language. This has nothing to do with nationalist sentimentalism. It is simply a matter of convenience, simplicity, and a way to fit in in a situation where communication involves people of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, speaking in Indonesian in a context that is *not* specifically Javanese-focused allows the Javanese to transcend their communitarian confinement (see Anderson 1990: 194–237). It is also a standard courtesy to an audience belonging to a nation where only Indonesian is officially prescribed and is widely respected as the modern language of a sovereign people (see Heryanto 2006c).

In contrast to most other *dangdut* performers past and present, Inul spoke to her audience in low Javanese (*Ngoko*). This was especially striking, given her fairly young age, and gender. But there was something more in Inul's style of speech when she was not singing. Most *dangdut* performers speak Indonesian in a style that emulates the speech of professional performers on television (self-consciously modern and national, professionally courteous, but formulaic). Usually the master of ceremonies (often male) in a show commands the highest authority, directing the attention of the audience, setting the order of the programs and making occasional jokes about them. In contrast, Inul was in full control of her own shows. She addressed her audience in a commanding, yet intimate, fashion in *Ngoko*, pointing her finger at local village heads, teasing the respected elders, and making irreverent jokes about them or herself in the style of a rock singer speaking to classmates in a school concert – all in aggressively low Javanese! Anticipating my conclusion, I should point out that all of this 'authority speech' disappeared when Inul was made a star in the capital city in mid-2003. She had to speak in Indonesian to the national audience; her clothing,

make-up, and performance style were dictated by professionals and were under their full control (discussed further below).[15]

What impressed me about Inul's early shows in East Java was the degree of tolerance that the local elders granted to such irreverent behaviour; more so than their tolerance for her erotic comments and dancing style. These were things she could do in her home base in Java. From late 2003, Inul lived luxuriously, occupying a large and very expensive residence with private guards in one of Jakarta's most prestigious neighbourhoods. But, until early 2003, she did not show any desire to seek a better career in the capital city or pursue some kind of rags-to-riches dream. She looked extremely contented in her home base. When asked in 2002 why she did not want to move to Jakarta, she explained that she was too happy in East Java. She also mentioned an accident in 1992 when she was offended by a sexual proposition from someone in Jakarta who offered her assistance in having her singing recorded (Susanti 2002; Dewanto and Flamboyan 2006).

When tensions heightened between supporters of Rhoma Irama and those of Inul, many in East Java took serious offence as a matter of regional pride. They took to the streets to protest against Rhoma Irama and to show their moral support for Inul with a regionalist tone of solidarity (*Kompas* 2003g; Mawardi 2003). One banner in these street rallies read 'Inul for President' (*Tempo* 2003a), referring to the general elections in the following year.

During that difficult time, Inul herself was contemplating a return to East Java, but eventually she only took an extended break, without moving back from Jakarta permanently. The regionalist solidarity with Inul came to the fore again in 2006 during another debate that divided the nation with scattered scuffles, between those supporters and opponents of the Anti-Pornography Bill (see Chapter 2; also Allen 2007). In support of the Bill, 50 members of a Jakarta-based and Islamist militia group Forum Betawi Rempug (Betawi Brotherhood Forum) went to Inul's residence and business office on 27 April 2006 in an intimidating manner.[16] They demanded that she leave Jakarta immediately or make a public apology for having danced indecently in public, and thus spoiled Jakarta's reputation, and for having supported the rally against the Anti-Pornography Bill in Jakarta (Dewanto and Flamboyan 2006; *Kompas* 2006). Some of Inul's supporters in East Java were outraged and threatened to force people of a Betawi ethnic background residing in Surabaya to leave.

Javanist Pleasure/Islamist Piety

One of the most significant aspects of the Inul debate, obvious to students of Indonesia but largely unspoken in the debate itself, was its articulation of the centuries-old tension between the Javanese syncretic adoption of Islam, and the more pious-minded Muslim advocacy for a correct or pure adherence to Islam. Earlier, I mentioned the significance of the change of name from the Arabic-sounding Ainur Rokhimah to the more Javanese-sounding

Inul Daratista. Inul had the inclination toward erotic dancing (no matter how 'mild' it may have appeared to some), as well as the nerve to invoke Islamic-derived expressions in making statements about her worldly passion for bodily pleasure. On one occasion during a show she turned her back to the audience, showed off her buttocks and asked if they were beautiful. Upon hearing the cheering crowd, she exclaimed with the typically Islamic expression '*Alhamdulillah*' (Thanks to Allah), and started her next song with a line thanking God for her beautiful buttocks.

A decade earlier, such a gesture would probably have been more common and would have taken little risk.[17] But in the 2000s, this could easily spark violent outrage if done in the wrong place, where religious matters were taken in a fatally serious manner. Even without such provocative behaviour, however, it was only to be expected that many contemporary Ulamas would not be impressed by Inulmania. While Inul's critics were not confined to the overtly Islamic organizations and communities, the fact remains that those markedly Islamic agencies have become the strongest opposition to Inulmania in Java, if not beyond.[18] She was banned in several areas, including the neighbouring towns of her place of birth (Nurbianto 2003; Shahab 2003) and in areas such the Yogyakarta Special District (*Jakarta Post* 2003a),which had previously hosted her (*Suara Merdeka* 2003b). But, in the city of Solo (Yogyakarta's major rival with regard to Javanese court culture and politics) (*Suara Merdeka* 2003a), and in Semarang, the capital city of Central Java (Yasa 2003), she was warmly welcomed.

That views among the Muslims were vastly diverse (after all, even Inul professes the faith) is attested to by the following incident. In first week of March 2003, a man telephoned the Great Mosque of Al-Akbar in Surabaya with a false identity. Claiming to speak on behalf of a local Islamic youth group, this caller demanded that a painting currently displayed in the mosque as part of an art exhibition be removed, or he would set the mosque on fire. Entitled *Berdzikir bersama Inul* (To recite religious texts with Inul) the painting was the work of a highly respected Ulama, KH Mustofa Bisri. It depicted a group of men in a circle reciting the sacred text, with Inul dancing in the middle of the circle. While security measures were increased, the demand was not met, and the threat was not carried out (Sugiharto 2003).

The sensitivity to the long-standing conflict between Islam and Javanism, and the less than unified stand among the Islamic communities in Java prevented many from mentioning it in public debates over Inul's performances.[19] But, perhaps out of ignorance of this undercurrent of tension, many commentators referred to controversial figures in American or Latin American pop cultures and compared them with Inul (for instance Susanti 2002). For many of her critics, Inul was a problem not so much for her being Javanese, whose tradition was allegedly tainted by mysticism, backwardness, and sexual promiscuity, but because she was linked to Westernization and capitalism in Indonesia generally, particularly with the blatantly profit-

driven entertainment industry (*Media Indonesia* 2003a). However, as Julia Suryakusuma noted:

> various aspects of Indonesian culture are very sensuous. They predate the arrival of Islam and can be seen in carvings in the various Hindu temples in Central Java and in many traditional performing arts. Compared with the jaipongan dance of West Java, the tayub of Central Java, or indeed, other established dangdut singers, whose movements are slower but more suggestive, Inul's dancing is much less erotic. ... Dangdut, the music of Inul's motion, is a reflection of Indonesia's rich culture and ethnic diversity. It is a blend of music from India, the Middle East, Portugal and Spain concocted by local artists into a distinctive Indonesian Malay rhythm.
>
> (Suryakusuma 2003b)

All of the above suggests that the debate over Inul's *dangdut* covers a broader area and more complex issues than the majority of commentators have indicated. Most of their statements are about an individual performer and her morality.

Patriarchy/the Women's movement

With the steady growth of the Indonesian women's movement and of public discourse of gender imbalance, it is not surprising that many activists in women-focused non-governmental organizations lent their support to Inul during the controversy. Neither is it surprising that more than a few have analysed the controversy from a feminist perspective, using the case to illustrate the gross arrogance of power in a strongly patriarchal society, and the lack of respect for women (Iswara 2003). For some, therefore, Inul epitomized a potential for women's emancipation (Pambudy 2003).

The world's major religions are biased in favour of males. It is not accidental that the majority of key figures who opposed Inul's performance were male, occupying important positions in governmental or religious institutions. When Rhoma Irama and his disciples launched their condemnation of what they saw as the degradation of *dangdut*, several names were identified as the culprits, among whom Inul was one. All the others – Anisa Bahar, Uut Permatasari, and Ira Swara – were also women.

It is interesting to note that the view of the Sultan of Yogyakarta on this issue was in direct opposition to that of his wife. Without making a strong statement of condemnation as many others had done, the Sultan expressed some endorsement for the restrictions upon Inul performing in Yogyakarta (Heru 2003). In contrast, his wife disagreed with the general criticism launched against Inul as being immoral or degrading women. She described Inul's performance as beautiful, and she expressed her surprise that Inul had been made a target of criticism. Any problems associated with

Inul, according to her, were problems of perception among men (*Swaranet* 2003).

While male officials in the government and male-dominated society at large debated the vices and virtues of Inul's performance, many wives of state officials approached Inul and requested that she teach them to dance like her (*Pos Kota* 2003). The gender battle appeared to outlast the Inul controversy. Not long after Rhoma declared his dispute with Inul over, a series of emails circulated on the internet questioning Rhoma's marital fidelity, and one tabloid even published it. In response, Rhoma filed a lawsuit against the publisher (see Yuliawati and Utami 2003).

The profiles of those involved in the debate were more complicated than simply those of pious versus syncretic or moderate Muslims, or parochial East Javanese versus metropolitan Jakartans. There was a strong division along gender lines as well, as conceptually distinct from biological sexes (see Chapter 2). But as Pioquinto (1995) and Browne (2000) have shown, issues of gender in *dangdut* are multi-faceted, with ambiguities and contradictory fragments, making it difficult to state unequivocally that *dangdut* in general, or Inul in particular, is a clear-cut case of women's empowerment or subordination. There is an element of both.

Lower/Upper Class Cultural Tastes

Just as it was with the film *Selamat Tinggal Jeanette* discussed earlier, an unequal distribution of power was also visible in terms of class positions and cultural dispositions among those involved in the Inul controversy. In the case of Inul, as with the film, the under-class was there but was largely precluded from taking an active part in the public debate.[20] I agree with Wardhana (2003) and Widijanto (2003) who argue that the dispute between Rhoma Irama and Inul was an expression of a class-based conflict of cultural tastes, but we need to go further.

It must be emphasized that the term 'class' is used here not in any strict Marxian sense, with specific reference to capitalist and proletarian classes. Rather, the term is understood here in the Weberian sense as a distinct hierarchical position of honour, authority, prestige, and market opportunity. This allows us to distinguish, in the broadest terms, the elite on the one hand, from the subordinate or subaltern on the other. In contemporary Indonesia, the former includes the newly emerging bourgeoisie, state officials, top military officers, and party elite, as well as urban professionals, and the wealthy. Among these groups one can expect no or very limited attachment to *dangdut* music. Rhoma Irama claimed rightfully that he and his group had been responsible for the increased popularity of *dangdut* among the privileged class. We can add that one secret of his success was his ability to modify and gentrify *dangdut* to satisfy the senses and tastes of the privileged class. He did not challenge the class distinction itself.

Inul was slightly different, at least until early 2003.[21] When I conducted field research in East Java, most air-conditioned shopping malls had shops that sold all sorts of VCDs and DVDs, but none sold VCDs of Inul! I had to go 'down' to the wet market, and kiosks outside the market to find vendors who sold them. Many of these vendors had only a sheet of plastic or a mattress unfurled on the pavement, on which the vendors displayed their merchandise. A VCD recording of a live *dangdut* performance at someone's wedding, birthday, or village festival cost Rp. 5,000 (slightly over US$1), or about 20% of the cost of most VCDs produced and consumed by the privileged class, and sold in the shopping malls. Inul's VCDs could be easily found among those sold on the sidewalks. The quality of these VCDs is very poor; in fact, most that I bought could be played only in parts.

Inul asserted her style in the manner of the subaltern that appeared too coarse for the taste of the privileged class. She appeared to have no problem with that and did not attempt to do otherwise. Her challenge to the status quo was not, or was not only, to do with issues of moral decency and sexuality. Rather, she had managed to attract a significant segment of the privileged class to her style of performance. Apparently, it was this unwelcome 'invasion' of the privileged public sphere, polluting or corrupting the respected culture of the privileged class, that upset members of that class which constituted most of her critics. Globally, this class has a strong tendency to be conservative, morally and politically. Unsurprisingly, among the privileged class, many quickly compared Inul with the Malaysian singer Siti Nurhaliza mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Siti was best known and much loved in Indonesia for her singing talents in a genre called *Melayu* ('Malay'), which is *dangdut*'s antecedent (see YOT and Mutia 2003). In this comparison, Inul versus Siti equals vulgarity–decadence–eroticism–revolt versus authentic Malayness–beauty–civility–chastity (Mustappa 2003).

In the eyes of Inul's supporters, Rhoma Irama represented a particular class position, closely associated with authoritarianism and not simply maleness, Muslimhood, or Jakartanness. Several commentators on the Inul controversy expressed an indignation against his arrogance and abuse of such self-righteous power (Abhiseka 2003; *Jakarta Post* 2003b; Kurniawan 2003a; *Tempo* 2003a, b), without any reference to religious difference or to regional or gender politics. To make matters worse, many commentators noted the double standards and hypocrisy among the privileged class. Why attack the poor performer, they asked, when big-time corrupt officials had been left alone (Asy'arie 2003; Nurbianto 2003)?

In her interview with *Time Asia*, Inul did not take issue with the Council of Ulamas on details of religious teachings. Rather,

> Write this down (she commands). The MUI should realize that Indonesia is not a Muslim country, it's a democratic country. ... Why should they

> care about me when there are pornographic VCDs and prostitutes in the street? They choose me because I am an easy target.
>
> (Walsh 2003)

The law enforcers did not simply remain passive when Inul's civil rights as a performer were illegally violated; in fact, many officials were too busy trying to extort extra revenues from those who ran the entertainment business and organized events for Inul, by imposing extra fees (*Kompas* 2003d).

In light of the above, one can hypothesize that Inul would have been left alone with her 'bad taste' activity, had her popularity not transcended her hometown and the neighbouring towns. In fact, Inul was left alone until she became popular nationally. Indeed many of her counterparts, past and present, have been left alone, as none of them have been even half as successful as Inul. It is important to note that Inul's allegedly 'pornographic', 'indecent' or 'erotic' behaviour pales into insignificance against most *dangdut* performers before, during, and after the controversy of 2003 (Pioquinto 1995; *Kompas* 2003b, c, e). Even the Chair of the largest Islamic mass-organization, KH Hasyim Muzadi of Nahdlatul Ulama, explicitly concurred upon this point when Inul was attacked by other leaders of the same and other Islamic organizations (*Media Indonesia* 2003a).

With the same logic, we can understand how the Inul controversy came to an end. Her reappearance in June 2003, the setting of the show, and the kind of audience invited to watch her live performance in the studio, were all the complete opposites of her performances in small towns of East Java barely a year earlier. In June 2003 Inul looked dazzling in her exuberantly flamboyant clothing, in a flashing multi-coloured studio at the nation's most self-consciously upper-class station TransTV. On top of her designer clothes, she wore what looked like a winter coat with fur around the neck, which she took off as she started her second song, accompanied all the while by different groups of professional back-up dancers. As she appeared in the main television screen, viewers could not miss the messages displayed at the bottom of the screen showing a long list of credits for Jakarta's top fashion designers who had contributed to her appearance for the evening.

The audience that evening included many celebrities. Indeed, it looked the who's who of the Jakarta elite, carefully selected for their liberal outlook. The camera moved back and forth between Inul on stage and the distinguished members of the audience. During several and lengthy intervals, the master of ceremonies interviewed members of the audience who expressed their views of Inul's performance and the recent controversy. Many of these statements were greeted with long applause. Without exception, all articulated enthusiastic moral support for Inul and asked her to remain strong in the face of the attacks against her.

While the laudatory remarks made her seem a new heroine of the nation, Inul actually looked timid in the shadow of her highly credentialled

audience. The male commanding master of ceremonies directed the entire show himself, instructing Inul when to move, sing, or speak. The multi-dimensional conflict that had unfolded over several months came to an end here, with the media industry being the major victor. Inul had not only been recuperated by the privileged class, but had, in fact, been admitted to membership of this class.[22] Her status was upgraded, but she was stripped of all her power, and all her subversive subaltern attributes. Order had been restored, at least until the anti-pornography debate broke out, and the class hierarchy of cultural politics was once again well entrenched.

Digital Divide/Empowerment

I have noted the triumph of the upper-class in the story of Inul. Below, I offer a slightly contradictory story. At the beginning of this section on Inul, I suggested the critical contribution of digital technology to Inul's early career, Let me now return to this issue.

During the Inul controversy, some gaps appeared in the common understanding of the use of digital technology, particularly in what used to be called 'Third World' countries such as Indonesia. One such common misunderstanding was that this technology – like any other technology that had come before it – mainly served the interests of the powerful, and wealthy. Such a problematic view is symptomatic of the mindset of many in the 'First' as well as 'Third' worlds who live under the spell of modernization theory with its unilineal perspective of history. Electronics is one – and perhaps the only – commodity yet invented that is consistently becoming more and more accessible to a wider range of people, its function increasingly user-friendly to the masses, and its cost consistently cheaper as it develops over time. This trend is attested to by the production and consumption of watches, radios, and mobile telephones. Its power as one of the most equalizing forces in contemporary societies has been misunderstood (with some overestimating and others underestimating it). Another common misunderstanding has to do with issues of legality and copyright, symptomatic of the age of mechanical production, the rise of the nation, prints, and private ownership under capitalism from the past century.

The story of Inul provides an opportunity to re-examine many of these common assumptions. Despite some validity in the arguments about the digital divide across the globe, we often oversimplify matters, by underestimating the capacity of the under-privileged classes to take advantage of what is available to them. For example, in Indonesia no organization has made the most of the internet as extensively as the bygone *jihadi* network called Laskar Jihad, and precisely because of their limited resources (Hefner 2003). While many observers agreed on the contribution of VCDs to Inul's success, they have often inaccurately described them as '*liar*' (wild) or '*bajakan*' (pirated), or '*amatir*' (amateur) (Bajuri 2002; *Bintang Indonesia* 2003; Gunawan 2003; *Kompas* 2003a, h; Wasono 2003).[23]

Actually, most of these early VCDs of Inul are neither 'wild' nor 'pirated' in the sense of being illegal reproductions of pre-existing official copies of the 'original'. In no known case did any other or more 'official' and 'original' copyrighted copies of these video recordings existed. Many of these VCDs were recordings of *dangdut* performers at social events, such as weddings, circumcisions, or festivals; they were mass reproduced before being sold. Whether or not they are 'amateur' is more difficult to say. They are so in the sense that many of these recordings carry the text 'not for sale' that runs through the moving image when played. But they are not so 'amateur' in the sense that these recordings are widely distributed for sale. Neither are they 'wild' nor 'amateur' in the light of the fact that the full name and contact details of the companies that produce these recording are displayed in the moving images as well.

The story behind the production of these recordings may be unfamiliar to many observers, especially those coming from highly commercialized societies where private property is monetarily valued and copyright well protected. In many small towns of Java in the early 2000s, aspiring *dangdut* performers would go to one of these recording companies and pay several million rupiahs (around US$200 or so) to have their singing recorded with video cameras. This recording might take place at the studio of the recording company with no audience, or at one of their live performances at social events as mentioned above. The junior singers would then circulate copies of these recordings to friends and relatives as promotional materials (*Kompas* 2003f). One might suspect that, in some of these cases, selected titles were reproduced in large numbers for sale without the prior consent of the singers, but perhaps with their knowledge after the fact. In cases involving more popular singers such as Inul, recordings of their performances might not involve payment on the part of the singers. The recordings might be taken with the authorization of the host of the event, and perhaps not of the singers. Copies of such materials would circulate among friends and relatives, until they arrived in the hands of someone with an entrepreneurial instinct who would reproduce them for sale in the streets.

Whether the singers took the initiative and paid for the recording, or their performance was recorded without their prior consent, no share of the profit from the sale would go to the artists. But no single case has been reported of an artist complaining, or demanding that their copyright be respected, and a share of the profit be paid to them. In fact, the opposite is true. In all published reports on this practice, including those pertaining to Inul, the artists expressed gratitude, acknowledging the non-material and non-immediate rewards of being promoted by the unauthorized circulation of the VCDs (Bajuri 2002; Wasono 2003). It was this misunderstanding background that led a *Time Asia* reporter to the problematic conclusion that 'Indonesians snapped up copies of illegally recorded VCDs of Inul ... making her perhaps the first musician to owe much of her fame to piracy'

(Walsh 2003). In the new world of post-modernity, digital technology works for, and serves, the underprivileged in ways that are not always readily obvious or logical to the members of privileged class with their ideas about the rule of law, copyright, and private ownership.

The Chapters

Subsequent chapters in the book examine, more specifically and in greater detail, different aspects of the issues introduced in this opening chapter. These chapters address old and new questions of nationhood (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 8); Asianness (Chapters 3 and 5); globalization (Chapter 6); gender (Chapters 2, 5, 7 and 9); youth (Chapters 3, 6, and 9); ethnicity (Chapter 4); and class (Chapters 5 and 9) as they appear in ideological battles in contemporary Indonesian popular culture. Materials for their analyses are taken from various sources and cover a range of media technologies, including film (Chapters 2, 3, and 4); television programs (Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8), and urban staged concerts (Chapter 9).

What bring all these chapters together is a common concern with the open-ended questions of identity for the great majority of Indonesians – the common populace – as articulated in popular cultures at this particular historical moment, full of promise, but also of threats, uncertainties, and some nostalgia for a selectively understood past. It is a moment of history with multiple centres of power, the trauma of post-authoritarianism and economic crisis, as well as seductive worldly pleasures in tension with strong and increasing belief in a divine solution. With different emphases and styles, each of these chapters takes details of their materials seriously for analysis, acknowledging the socio-historically situated expression and consumption of culture at the popular level. Each of these chapters also considers the broader issues of negotiated identities as implicated in the production and consumption practices of pop cultures during the past decade or so.

In Chapter 2, Marshall Clark explores the interconnections between politics, gender, and censorship in contemporary Indonesian cinema. Contextualizing Indonesian cinema within the broader processes of Indonesia's social and political transformations, he examines to what extent cinema has benefited from the crumbling of censorship, and whether new threats to the freedom of expression will cast an unwelcome shadow over the development of cinema. His chapter also looks at what Indonesian films themselves reveal about these threats. By analysing the production, consumption and aesthetics of several Indonesian films, this chapter shows significant thematic directions in Indonesian cinema, including the representation of violence and the masculine, which have hitherto remained understudied. An understanding of the cultural logics of violence and masculine behaviour in recent Indonesian cinema will support the thesis on an emerging 'masculinist cast' in contemporary Indonesia.

Issues of gender from female perspectives or with specific emphasis on women in Indonesian films are critically analysed by David Hanan in Chapter 3. He compares two films from Indonesia (*Catatan Si Boy*, 1987, and *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*, 2001) and two from Thailand (*Kling Wai Gorn Por Son Wai*, 1991, and *Girl Friends*, 2002). Based on his close reading of these films, Hanan argues that these movies are concerned with reinventing and preserving traditions even as they embrace a culture of the future. Hanan notes significant differences in ideas of the group and particularly of body language from those one finds in Western counterparts.

In Chapter 4, I offer a preliminary assessment of the political significance of the increased presence of the Chinese ethnic minority in contemporary Indonesia's popular culture. Against the backdrop of the broader changes in literary writings, television shows, and urban lifestyles, this chapter analyses two recent semi-historical films, *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) and *Gie* (2005). Both feature a Chinese Indonesian as the main protagonist. To appreciate the significance of the new trends, this chapter takes into account the long-standing absence of the Chinese minority from Indonesia's national literature and films, and of any mention of the social tensions that grew from the position of this ethnic minority. Their absence in these media is odd, given both the attention paid to them in other genres of public discourse and the large share of Chinese Indonesians in the production of Indonesian literature and films.

Closely related in theme, the next chapter, by Rachmah Ida, investigates the unprecedented scale of popularity of Asian-imported television drama series in contemporary Indonesia. Many of these series present 'oriental'-looking, Mandarin speaking protagonists to viewers in society where a long-standing anti-Chinese sentiment prevails, and anyone with an oriental look can be indiscriminately stereotyped as '*keturunan Cina*' (of Chinese descent). What intrigues the author is how the local television markets have accepted and consumed the foreign (and non-Western) TV dramas in ways that suggest a resistance to the long-standing dominance of American pop cultures. Another important aspect of this chapter is its grounded study, focusing on urban under-class women in the city of Surabaya in their engagements with the characters in a Taiwanese TV drama, *Meteor Garden*. The chapter suggests how class, gender, and age matter when these viewers react to the (male and female) characters in the television show. Chapter 6 continues a critical examination of whatever magic television shows have worked upon their urban viewers, but this time with a focus on very different class tastes and aspirations. In her study, Penelope Coutas studies how a new celebrity identity has been created in and by the media in twenty-first century Indonesia. Examining reality television shows, particularly talent quests such as *Indonesian Idol*, *Akademi Fantasi Indosiar*, and *Kontes Dangdut Indonesia*, this chapter considers issues of cultural imperialism, globalization, audience interactivity, and 'glocalization'. Materials in this chapter offer a rich source for exploring issues of celebrity production and

consumption in Indonesia today, and for examining the notion of the 'active, interactive audience' within a context of globalization and increasing commercialization of cultural products and practices. Significant to further study of pop cultures in Asia, Coutas' findings suggest that there is not only a new kind of celebrity in Indonesia, but also a new kind of fan, forcing us to reconsider traditional notions of the celebrity-fan relationship in Indonesia and beyond. The next two chapters continue the examination of television programs, especially those that project fantasies and contempts of, or among, the nation's top elite. In Chapter 7, Vissia Yulianto focuses on 'gossip shows' popularly known as 'infotainment'. Gossip shows are usually understood to be an option for viewers during leisure time. In contemporary Indonesia, however, Yulianto discovers that viewing gossip shows has become a main activity for many women during the day. Many young girls, university students, housewives, and workers appeared to have become obsessed with these programs, which are screened between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Unlike reality shows that fictionalize 'real life' (e.g. *Big Brother*), infotainment is documentary, but it is produced and consumed primarily for its entertainment value. Love affairs, divorce, and conflicts between celebrities and the like are the main content. This study examines how 'gossip shows' have further developed patterns of gossiping. In the next chapter, Edwin Jurriëns appraises the significance of an extremely popular television program called *Newsdotcom*, which narrated a fictional country called Republik Mimpi (Republic of Dreams). The program can be easily classified as parody, but Jurriëns argues there are many more important things that can be said about it. Using the concept of hyper-reality, or simulated reality, the author analyses the television show as an attempt by democratically minded Indonesians to project and consolidate their vision of the process of social, political, and economic reform known as *Reformasi*. According to Jurriëns, this program decouples 'simulation' from 'simulacra' (opaque, empty, or non-referential signs), while signalling a phase in Indonesian politics and social life where people no longer have to rely on relatively few and indirect strategies such as parody for expressing diversity or dissent in the public sphere.

In their separate analyses of television shows, these last two mentioned chapters engage with the problems of distinguishing facts and reality in television consumption. Similar problems are the object of scrutiny in the last chapter by Martin Richter. The author analyses several music events in Yogyakarta in 2001, and identifies the participants' highly physical and animated entries into what he terms 'Other Worlds'. These other world musical 'physicalizations' fall into two categories based on the performance setting and dance form: neighbourhood trance dancing, and the commercial zone swaying of the entire body in rebellion and/or celebration. The chapter argues that these acts produce outlets of expression that help to transcend the performer/audience divide and gender, generational and class divisions. Additionally, by comparing popular culture forms that are found in

neighbourhoods and commercial-zones respectively, the chapter problematizes the correlations often made between 'coarse' (*kasar*) behaviour and social powerlessness in Java (as was also observable in the case of Inul, discussed in the earlier section of this opening chapter). Collectively, chapters in this book raise a set of questions (and offer some answers), about newly negotiated social identities in post-authoritarian Indonesia. In this complex field of identity formations and negotiations, issues of gender, ethnicity, class, regionalism, nationhood, globalization, and youth appear most pressing. Most of the contributors to this book are emerging scholars from Indonesia and Australia who aspire to engage with fresh perspectives in the newly developing area of pop culture within the scholarly communities of Indonesian and Asian studies. The book seeks to make some modest contribution to cultural, media, and Asian studies by raising questions of common interest to researchers, analysts, practitioners, students, and anyone working in those areas.

The book is not oriented towards theorization. However, by providing a critical analysis of first-hand collected materials from field study, it raises several critical issues of methodology that may contribute to further efforts in theoretical enquiry, and comparative analysis with cases from other societies. This chapter argues for the need to take pop culture more seriously than has been done in the study of contemporary societies, including Indonesia. The importance of the Inul controversy of 2003 and, closely related to that, the Anti-Pornography Bill debate of 2006 is not reducible to whatever valuable information they contribute to our understanding of something 'more important' at a higher level, such as national politics or history. In Indonesia, those controversies are at the very heart of Indonesian national politics, the people's diverse senses of identity and self-respect. At stake in these divisive debates is the future of Indonesia's sustainability, and indeed its survival, as a plural nation-state against the threat of disintegration or tyranny.

In analysing the Inul controversy, this chapter underscores two methodological issues. First, the need to go beyond close reading of a particular work of pop culture, and quantitatively measure its production and consumption, as have strongly characterized many studies of the subject matter in the region. A consideration of the political and historical contexts of the controversy is imperative, not optional, for capturing the long-standing significance of the whole debate. This goes far beyond issues of moral decency as the controversy has been mainly articulated. Second, this chapter also illustrates how an ethnographic field work can be significantly instrumental to the study of pop culture. A study of the Inul controversy will be seriously flawed without adequate understanding of the minute details of her early performances and the use of digital technology by the under-class. These latter aspects of Inul's career are not readily available in major shops and libraries. Indeed, they have largely escaped the attention of middle-class scholars and other cultural analysts alike.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 During his tour to Indonesia in 1988, and following his rowdy concert in Jakarta, Mick Jagger was hijacked by a New Order state minister to accompany him to launch a bicycle race (Foulcher 1990: 304). I recall a conversation in the early 1990s with poet-cum-journalist Goenawan Mohamad if he would be interested in running for presidency in the future. In his typical style, he replied he was poorly qualified, because he did not play saxophone (alluding to President Clinton playing the musical instrument as reported in Indonesian media).
2 The crisis in the film industry in the early 1990s was a result of several factors, including the severe state censorship, a huge increase of imported films, especially from Hollywood, the emergence of private television networks with attractive entertainment programs, and dissemination of videos, most of which were cheap pirated copies (Sen and Hill 2000: 137–41).
3 In the first half of the 1960s, President Sukarno tried to strike a balance among three major ideologies which he termed Nasakom, abbreviation for Nasionalisme, Agama, and Komunisme (nationalism, religion, and communism). For a different take on the matter, but to which my analysis here is partly indebted, see Cribb (1999). Elsewhere, I attempted another discussion on these major forces that have made today's Indonesia (Heryanto 2005: 63–65).
4 I am indebted to Harvey (1992: 9–12) for this conception.
5 Directed by Bobby Sandy, the film was based on a novel of the same title, authored by Titie Said (1986). Foulcher's analysis, which is summed up here, is based on the film, which departs slightly from the novel. Ria Irawan (as Trima) won the 1988 Indonesian Film Festival Citra Award for the title of Supporting Actress.
6 This is a very murky period that has received a considerable attention from a wide variety of analysts with diverging conclusions. I have referred to some of the more important literature on this subject matter in my own analysis of the impacts of the mid-1960s violence on the lives of many Indonesians in the 1990s (Heryanto 2006b).
7 For a brief history of the early formation of *dangdut* see YOT and Mutia (2003), for a more recent one see *Kompas* (2003b).
8 Social changes during this period have generated voluminous analyses with diverging emphasis and arguments. The works of Robert Hefner (1999, 2000) are probably better known among many, although reviewers of his book (2000) are somewhat mixed in their reception (see Fealy 2001).
9 Walsh (2003) made a more modest estimate, 'from $1,100 to $1,700' (USD).
10 For further estimates and calculations of her income, which may exceed that of the salary of the President, see CyberTainment (2003).
11 VCD stands for video compact discs, playable on CD and DVD players, but with a lower quality and resolution than DVDs.
12 Some of these political parties were so desperate to obtain her support in 2004 that they offered to pay her Rp. 30,000,000,000 (US$3.1 million) for 24 shows of party campaign (*Tempo* 2004). She declined. Inul has always stayed clear from any party politics.
13 I have previously discussed these tensions in a briefer version in Heryanto (2006a).

14 For more on the attempt to propagate a nativist Indonesian set of values, see Bourchier (1997); for an assessment of Asian Values see Ang and Stratton (1995), Chua (1995).
15 Hera Diani (2004a) of *The Jakarta Post* is seriously mistaken and overtly metropolitan-biased when noting that after being famous and rich Inul 'no longer appeared to be the coy small-town girl made big'.
16 Betawi is the name of what has been commonly understood as the 'native' ethnic community of Jakarta and the immediate surrounding areas.
17 Incidentally, I noticed another case in point. Indonesia's most commercially successful theatrical show *Opera Kecoa* (The Cockroach Opera) by Teater Koma contained jokes with allusions to Islam piety and moralism when first staged in 1985, but these lines were deleted when the same play was staged in 2003. For discussion on other aspects of *Opera Kecoa*, see Zurbuchen (1990).
18 A music program for television featuring controversial Inul was also banned in Malaysia, because it was considered 'too raunchy' (*Jakarta Post* 2003d).
19 Exceptions include *Kompas* (2003i), Suryakusuma (2003a, b), and Sutarto (2003), all acknowledging the centuries-old tradition in Java, thus problematizing the arguments that Inul's eroticism is 'foreign' to Indonesia's self, culture, and history.
20 For a critique of how 'little people' has been constructed and misappropriated by the middle-class discourses in media, see Weintraub (2006). For a discussion of the intersection of subordinated class and subordinated gender in a variety of *dangdut* performances in Java see Browne (2000), and of *dangdut* in the formation of civil society in Indonesia see Mulligan (2005).
21 Incidentally, Inul's home town is next to that of Marsinah, the legendary labour activist who was brutally murdered in 1993. Nearly all published reports of her case incriminate the complicity of members of a local military corps. As noted earlier, Surabaya, the capital city of East Java, is home of the second-largest industrial site in the country.
22 The show begins with video clips, showing Inul in solitude, wiping her tears. Called *Rindu Inul* ('Missing Inul'), the show was presented with a theme of a poor innocent girl unjustly being assaulted by villains on moral grounds. The message was conveyed by the selection of the songs with relevant lyrics, and by the way the interspersed discussions were conducted.
23 One exception is Adi (2002).

2 Indonesian cinema

Exploring cultures of masculinity, censorship and violence

Marshall Clark

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse configurations of men and masculinity in modern Indonesian culture and media, primarily focusing on recent cinema. Although there is a substantial body of scholarship on the role of hegemonic constructions of gender in post-colonial Indonesia (Sears 1996; Blackburn 2004; Suryakusuma 2004), no rigorous assessment has been made of representations of men, men's practices or masculinity in Indonesian culture, including Indonesian cinema, where male film-makers and male protagonists are dominant and influential.

Reflecting feminist emphases, gendered analyses of Indonesian cinema have primarily focused on women (Heider 1991; Sen 1994, 1995, 2005). The historical dominance of men, meanwhile, has been treated as the 'norm'. While the scholarly impulse has hitherto been focused on the feminine or other issues of social and political importance, portrayals of men or masculinity in cinema have been seen as unproblematic. But masculinity has not been discussed or analysed as though it is the 'norm'. Critically, analysing images of men *as men* in recent Indonesian cinema – and cultural expression in general – has barely occurred. Despite the boom in international men's studies over the last 15 years or so, scholarship in Indonesian gender studies has been much slower than in other countries to incorporate the study of men and masculinity. This chapter will attempt to re-address the curious scholarly lacunae in the field of Indonesian cinema and gender studies.

The heart of this chapter will revolve around a discussion of violence and the masculine in Indonesia, with a focus on *Mengejar Matahari* (Chasing the Sun) (2004) and *9 Naga* (9 Dragons) (2006), two films by one of Indonesia's most prolific young film-makers, Rudi Soedjarwo. Ultimately, I would argue that comprehending the cultural logics of violence and masculine behaviour in Soedjarwo's recent films may help us to view censorship in the post-New Order era as a function of what Boellstorff (2004) refers to as an emerging 'masculinist cast' in contemporary Indonesia. This chapter will begin, however, with a discussion of the nexus between masculinity and

censorship in Indonesia, before discussing some of the key issues in recent Indonesian cinema.

Men and the Masculine in Indonesia

There are a number of possible factors that have recently brought a greater focus on masculinity in Indonesian gender discourse. These include an embattled and misogynistic response to the increasing social and economic emancipation of women; feelings of masculine disempowerment in the face of global economic trends such as the Asian economic crisis; and an ongoing renegotiation of nation, gender, and hegemonic masculinities in the post-New Order period. In this sense, there are suggestions that masculinity must now be taken more into account. Yet until very recently, 'gender' has been widely regarded as a euphemism for 'women's issues', and the increasing work on gender among both Western and Indonesian academics and activists has been focused disproportionately on women (Oetomo 2000).

Besides a lack of interest from feminist scholars and women's activists, an obverse factor delaying reflection on masculinity and men's practices in Indonesia has been an inherent ambivalence towards women's groups. Moreover, there continues to be a persistent social perception – inculcated through the New Order's patriarchal gender regime – that the feminine is a threat to male dominance, including, by extension, the state's dominance. Saparinah Sadli observes:

> While women are in the process of defining [a] new feminist paradigm, the establishment looks at this process as a threat. We have nothing to lose but they have everything to lose. Men could see that during the recent [economic] crisis women could find jobs more easily and better meet the demands of the market.
>
> (Budianta 2000: 109)

The inherent 'threat' of the feminine is not necessarily a new development. In stark contrast to the colonial era when women were defined as comrades in the revolutionary struggle, Suharto's military regime was 'built on an excessively masculine power obsessed with control and women's submission' (Wieringa 2003: 72). Moreover, for some, orchestrated attacks against homosexual gatherings have been interpreted as evidence of both masculine and state insecurity (Boellstorf 2004). This point will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

It is also salient to observe that societal upheaval, coupled with economic disappointment and the resulting feelings of disempowerment, has also driven many men to seek solace in Islam. Not coincidentally, many hardline Islamic groups are increasingly suspicious of feminism and the recent proliferation of women's groups. As Platzdasch argues, 'conservatives generally view the call for self-determination by women as "un-Islamic", and as

a threat to the integrity of the smallest unit and core of Muslim society, the family' (Platzdash 2000: 336). State and Islamic discourses have long worked together in Indonesia (Blackwood 2005), and here we can see the Islamic emphasis on the sanctity of the family – and the valorization of female domesticity – continue to reinforce the New Order's patriarchal perspective on gender and sexuality.

The deeply conservative line on gender held by many Islamic leaders and publications has also led to a resurgence of polygamy in recent years. According to Blackburn, 'for some Islamic conservatives, polygamy is something to be proud of, the badge of a devout Muslim' (Blackburn 2004: 134). Most Indonesian women, including many Muslim women who recognize that polygamy is sanctioned in the Qu'ran, strongly disagree with such an attitude. On the other hand, some women support it, even if they are deeply unhappy about their own husband taking a second or third wife.

Islamisasi and a 'New' Kind of Censorship

Significantly, the Islamic turn can also be closely associated with the emergence of 'new' kinds of censorship in the post-Suharto era. To demonstrate this point, perhaps it is pertinent to briefly mention an intriguing off-beat Indonesian comedy released in 2005, entitled *Ketika* (When).[1] In terms of plot, *Ketika* is set in either a parallel world or the near future, a future where Indonesia appears to be governed by an absurd number of rules and regulations. For instance, at one point in the film, set in Jakarta, we see that it is forbidden to throw rubbish in the street, jay-walk or even step on grass. At another point in this absorbing satire on Indonesian society and culture, we see a framed image of the future President, who looks suspiciously like a younger parody of Abu Bakr Bashir, the leader of militant Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah. These sly comments on the direction of Indonesian society and culture seem to have been overlooked by Indonesian film critics, who have preferred to focus on the absorbing plot. The plot itself is a delicious variation on the prince to pauper theme: Tajir Saldono (Deddy Mizwar) is an extremely wealthy businessman charged with corruption, and he and his family are eventually thrown out into the street, in their underwear, with barely a penny to their name.

At a time when concerns have been raised over the political opportunism of radical Islamic groups, clearly this film illustrates how art reflects, or even foreshadows, Indonesia's changing social and political climate. Less than a year later, *Ketika*'s mischievous vision of the future had become quite familiar. For instance, in late 2005 and early 2006, Indonesian society and media was rocked by heated debates and violent demonstrations over the insulting Danish cartoons of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. Angry reactions to the cartoons were reportedly taking place in many continents across the globe, of course. Yet in Indonesia's case the initial demonstrations had a sequel: in early 2006 the gestation and birth of an Indonesian

version of the American *Playboy* magazine was greeted by widespread anger and dismay, especially from Muslim groups. The second wave of demonstrations were characterized by flag and magazine burnings, anti-West placards, threats of legal action, and, ultimately, the destruction of the *Playboy* magazine's Jakarta office. However, the office was subsequently moved to the predominantly Hindu island of Bali, and the *Playboy* magazine continues to be sold. By both Western and Indonesian standards, the first few editions were quite tame, with no nudity or partial nudity at all. Nevertheless, later in the year the editor of the magazine, Erwin Arnada, and the local *Playboy* licence holders, Ponti Carolus Pondian and Okke Gania, appeared at the South Jakarta District Court to face charges of publishing indecent materials.

Moreover, for much of 2006, the Indonesian parliament, attempting to appease both mainstream and hard-line Islamic groups, seemed set to introduce a sweeping anti-pornography law. Known as the *Rancangan Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi*, RUU APP, the Anti-Pornography and Pornoaction Bill proposed to legislate against the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography in Indonesia. The bill also intended to regulate against instances of 'pornoaction', encompassing the public representation of nudity and erotic dancing, as well as kissing in public. Significantly, for many years there have been existing laws in Indonesia designed to regulate pornography. Yet these laws have rarely been enforced.[2] Furthermore, supporters of the bill used the widespread availability of pornography, particularly pirated VCD and DVD 'blue films' – originating from the West, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Asia – as reason enough to introduce the new law. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the proposed bill was officially withdrawn in late 2006, although attempts to redraft a milder version of the bill may continue. For now, the key point is that the momentum for the bill has dissipated, and its advocates were clearly defeated in the debate. At the time, however, coupled with the uproar associated with the Danish cartoons and *Playboy*, the anti-pornography law gave rise to popular fears about the return of censorship, self-censorship and the '*Islamisasi*' ('Islamification') of Indonesian society, culture, and politics.[3]

Despite the remarkable media focus devoted to the anti-pornography legislation, risqué Indonesian men's magazines and cheap pornographic tabloids have been proliferating since the late 1990s, without censure or meaningful criticism. These include the glossy and relatively expensive 'indigenous' *X Men's Magazine*, *Manly* and *Popular*. The market is also subdivided into health-oriented titles such as *Men's Health*, as well as magazines using similar names yet slightly different formats to other magazines originating in the United Kingdom, such as *FHM* and *Maxim*. Indonesia has also seen the emergence of low-grade weekly tabloids such as *Dugem, Wild Girls, Exotica* and *Lipstick*. Nevertheless, in mid-February 2006, all men's magazines were discreetly taken off Indonesian bookshelves

and roadside magazine stalls. With the increasingly vociferous calls for the banning of pornography, and the anti-*Playboy* demonstrations heating up, newsagents feared the financial cost of raids by over-eager local law enforcers. By the end of the year, things had returned to business as usual, and these magazines are now widely available. Nevertheless, at the time, this pre-emptive strike was clearly a case of self-censorship. Yet there was barely a whisper of protest. Evidently the new crop of men's magazines in Indonesia, and the ongoing tensions between predominantly male producers, consumers, and censorious local agents, deserve to be analysed in terms of being part of a far wider cultural phenomenon.

Colonial Gender Discourses and the Heightened Puritanism

If we are to properly understand trends such as the resurgence of polygamy, the emergence of militant Islam, new kinds of censorship, and the patriarchal legacies of the New Order, it is also helpful to examine earlier conservative colonial gender discourses. According to Wieringa, 'the processes of colonization, with its attendant phenomena of the feminization and eroticization of the colonized have left deep scars, resulting in particular sensitivities' (Wieringa 2003: 72). For instance, in the Dutch East Indies of the 1920s and 30s, there was a great deal of male anxiety and insecurity in the face of new European norms, such as the figure of the progressive, educated, Western-influenced modern woman. These notions were seen as threatening to established gender hierarchies and hegemonic understandings of women's nature and permissible social roles.

Many male writers in the late colonial era, including Takdir Alisjahbana and Armijn Pane, denounced the new overly Westernized freedom, which they believed brought moral degradation, sexual promiscuity, and disaster upon their female protagonists (Hatley 2002). These characteristics help us make sense of more recent patterns in post-colonial Indonesian literature. For instance, in texts of the 1970s and 80s by male authors such as Umar Kayam, Ahmad Tohari, and Linus Suryadi, 'nativist' images of female figures were a regular occurrence, drawing upon traditional, mythological archetypes of female compliance and subservience. In terms of the overarching political context at the time, the New Order state was aggressively promoting its ideology of a 'family-based' citizen-state, where women and girls were limited to dependent, subordinate wifely roles (Wieringa 2003). The other important aspect of this social conservatism was the need to curtail women and girls from indigenous female solidarity and autonomy. Thus, the rhetorical castigation of feminism in the 1980s and 90s was very similar to the widespread fear associated with the threat of the Western-influenced 'modern woman' in the 1920s and 30s. As Hatley observes, in both periods 'the spectre of the West as a source of threat to male power looms large, and contributes significantly to ideological attempts at control and containment' (Hatley 2002: 147).

For some in the post-colonial era, the West has continued to threaten male hegemony. The US-led war and occupation in the predominantly Muslim nation of Iraq – creating great social hardship, deep personal anguish, and untold numbers of deaths and human rights abuses – has led to a significant upsurge in anti-Western sentiment in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Australia's perceived meddling in East Timor's 1999 passage towards independence was also unpopular. The Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, and other acts of terror such as the bombing of the Australian Embassy in 2004, can be viewed as extreme expressions of anti-Western hatred. At the other end of the spectrum, the public outcry in Australia in relation to the imprisonment and 2005 Bali trial of convicted Australian drug trafficker Schapelle Corby also led to anti-Indonesia protests, burnings of Australian flags, and a variety of diplomatic incidents. Many Indonesians, aware of widespread Australian criticism of the Indonesian legal system, felt justified in feeling affronted. Finally, as discussed earlier, the introduction of an Indonesian *Playboy* in 2006 has proven to be particularly upsetting for many Islamic groups, most notably the hard-line *Front Pembela Islam* (The Muslim Defender's Front). This is because pornography – and *Playboy* in particular – has long been regarded as a pre-eminent symbol of Western decadence.

It appears, therefore, that the heightened degree of puritanism is closely related to a sense of national, religious, and gendered insecurity, invoked by a deep and abiding attitude of suspicion towards the West. This attitude, of course, has its roots in the cultural memory arising from centuries of Dutch colonialism and the struggle for independence, which as we know occurred far before the fiasco in Iraq and more recent examples of political and cultural colonization.

In terms of contemporary Indonesian cinema, anti-Western themes have not been a significant phenomenon. However, a great deal of what has been produced is by men, primarily focusing on what the films define as the male sphere of action, including warfare, employment, sexuality, violence, and criminality. In this respect, this chapter's critical study of some of the forms masculinities are taking in Indonesian cultural and cinematic expression, and their relationship with socio-historical change, is significant and overdue. Before commencing this discussion, however, a few pertinent observations will be made about Indonesian cinema in the context of the post-Suharto social and political climate.

Cinema in the Post-New Order Era

Recent developments in Indonesian cinema cannot be disassociated from the euphoria of the fall of President Suharto's authoritarian regime, when almost overnight Indonesia experienced a much more open political climate and the relaxing of restrictions on mass media. The impact on Indonesian cultural and artistic expression was immediate and profound. For example,

several years before Suharto's resignation, Indonesian cinema had virtually died, with barely a handful of films emerging between 1993 and 1998. However, with the emergence and success of *Kuldesak* (Cul-de-sac) (1998), Indonesia's first independent film, a new generation of Indonesian film-makers has been inspired (Clark 2004b). Since 1999, dedicated communities of independent film-makers have produced numerous short films. An impressive array of film festivals and screenings has been established throughout the archipelago, and admirers of Indonesian cinema have congregated on Internet chat forums. There has also been a welcome emergence of film magazines, such as *F: Majalah Film*, which is devoted to the discussion of Indonesian cinema and Indonesian film-makers.

As suggested in the earlier discussion of *Ketika*, the social and critical impulse of Indonesian cinema has remained undiminished in the post-Suharto era. 'Many of Indonesia's artists', according to the editors of the introduction to *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, 'feel that their art is only of value if it expresses the feelings of society and communicates with it' (Hooker and Dick 1995: 2). As a result, during the New Order era in particular, Indonesian artists worked hard to communicate directly with their audience, creatively engaging with issues of social and political significance. This has continued to be the case, even in the years after the demise of Suharto's authoritarian regime. Film-makers, particularly of independent and short films, have consistently explored issues of relevance to Indonesian society in recent years. Recent issues of interest, among many others, include teenage sexuality and domestic abuse (*Virgin*, 2005), urban drug culture (*Gerbang 13* [Gate 13], 2005), crime gangs (*9 Naga*), corruption (*Ketik*a, 2005; *Kejar Jakarta* [Chasing Jakarta], 2006), homosexuality (*Arisan* [Gathering], 2003) and the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh (*Serambi* [Verandah], 2006).

Of course, the willingness to tackle topical issues does not guarantee the financial or critical success of a film. Indeed, film-makers, like all Indonesian artists, are regularly held to account for aesthetic shortcomings. For example, according to one review of *Ketika*, 'If only this film had some half decent production values and direction up to the standard of cinematic release, this would be one of the candidates for the best-ever films made in Indonesia' (Mahendra 2006).

Another interesting trend has emerged: so many of Indonesia's cinematic releases are also appearing in novelized versions. Leading bookseller and publisher Gramedia is now doing a roaring trade in this respect, particularly with novelized versions of the dominant form of recent Indonesian cinema, the teen comedy. Soon after the releases of easily forgettable teen flicks such as *Mengejar Matahari*, *Gerbang 13*, *Brownies* (2005), or *Jomblo* (Bachelor Boy) (2006), novelized versions appeared. This feeds into increases in box-office sales, and also lucrative DVD and VCD sales. From time to time film scripts have also emerged, such as *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta? Sebuah Skenario* (What's Up With Love? A Screenplay) (Prananto 2002), or *Eliana Eliana* (Rusdi and Riza 2002). These screenplays – sometimes including introductions,

analysis, and interviews with the film-makers and writers involved – open up new understandings of Indonesian cinema. For instance, in the case of the published script of Riri Riza's critically acclaimed *Eliana Eliana* (2002), texts such as this reveal the fascinating process by which a film emerges from the kernel of an idea to a rough draft, and then through various re-drafts, and eventually blossoming into a fully-fledged script. The script of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* for example, also reveals the vast gap between the 'script' and the final polished product we see either on the cinema screen or on DVD.

In terms of numbers, in 2005 alone, Indonesian cinema witnessed more than 50 titles either released or produced (Rahman and Agusta 2005), and in 2006 this pattern was repeated. Cinema has clearly benefited from the crumbling of censorship. But the new threats to the freedom of expression have cast an unwelcome shadow over the development of mainstream and independent cinema. In 2006, key Indonesian actors and film-makers, such as Deddy Mizwar and Eddy D. Iskandar, joined in the chorus of opposition against the anti-pornography law (Hazmirullah 2006). Others might well have been privately despairing at the inability to represent realistic depictions of sex and sexuality in the immediate context of the bill. Just as the relaxing of Indonesia's media restrictions promised the unfettered depiction of one of the most taboo-filled topics in contemporary Indonesia, self-censorship has again intersected with censorship. Moreover, even if the bill was not passed in its initial form, as has occurred, at the time of writing this chapter the culture of censorship and self-censorship appears to be all-pervasive, with the state still playing a key role. For example, leading young film-maker Riri Riza was forced to contend with various scenes in his 2007 road movie – *3 Hari untuk Selamanya* (3 Days for Forever) – being cut by the anachronistic *Lembaga Sensor Film* (Film Censorship Institute) (*Suara Merdeka* 2007). Extraordinarily, other films, such as *Kuldesak* and the commercially successful *Arisan,* have managed to depict homoerotic kissing scenes, without censure. Why have these scenes been left uncut by the censor? Was it because these films were produced in the brief historical window of opportunity following the departure of Suharto and preceding the furore associated with the anti-pornography legislation?

Sadly, the salvation of freedom of expression is unlikely to come from the marketplace. This is because attracting the wrath of Muslim groups, on the lookout now for overt expressions of illicit or transgressive sexuality, undoubtedly has financial repercussions. For instance, no cinema chain wants to risk its cinemas being trashed by mobs of rampaging Islamic radicals enraged by the cinematic depiction of erotic or homosexual behaviour. Similarly, no film studio will want to see their latest cinematic investment fail to return a sizeable profit, due to poor ticket sales associated with negative publicity and court cases.

An additional point worth making is that there are a number of relevant thematic directions in the recent boom in Indonesian cinema. Of course, one of the most dominant genres of recent Indonesian cinema, as mentioned

earlier, is teen comedy. The enduring popularity of this genre is no doubt inspired by the reputed 2,000,000 viewers and subsequent financial success of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* Western observers have tended to focus on other themes. A handful of critics, from a broad feminist perspective, have welcomed the emergence of women film-makers in Indonesia, and the growth of films specifically devoted to women's issues (Sharpe 2002; Sen 2005). Consider, for instance, a film such as Nan Achnas' haunting and evocative *Pasir Berbisik* (Whispering Sands) (2001). In Indonesia, this low-budget film was a flop at the box-office, but it has been critically acclaimed and internationally recognized. For instance, it has been screened on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in Australia at least twice in the two or three years since the film was released. More importantly, it has been analysed, and celebrated, as an example of a film written and directed by a woman, about women, starring well-known women actors (including Christine Hakim and Dian Sastrowardoyo). In terms of consumption, the film is probably aimed at a female audience too. Other critics, such as Katinka van Heeren, have tended to focus on the business of film production, distribution, and consumption (van Heeren 2002a, 2002b). My interest, in this chapter and elsewhere (Clark 2004b), lies in some thematic aspects of Indonesian cinema that may have been overlooked, such as cinematic representations of violence and the masculine.

A New 'Masculinist Cast'?

By discussing recent Indonesian cinema in the context of the demise of Suharto's New Order regime, and Indonesia's current social and political transformations, important questions can be asked: to what extent has cinema benefited from the crumbling of censorship? Have the new freedoms merely led to a greater freedom to depict scenes of violence and degradation? Momentarily dodging the issue of censorship, which has not had a substantive impact on recent Indonesian cinema, I would suggest that recent films focusing on masculine behaviour draw attention to an endemic culture of violence in Indonesia, and masculine violence in particular. American anthropologist Tom Boellstorff refers to this propensity to violence as an important indicator of an emergent 'masculinist cast' in contemporary Indonesia. To be more precise, for Boellstorff this notion revolves around the conflict between heterosexism and homosexuality. Boellstorff argues that an unprecedented series of violent acts against groups of homosexual Indonesians that occurred from 1999 onwards indicates the emergence of what he terms as 'political homophobia'. For instance, on 11 November 2000, about 350 homosexuals and transvestites gathered for an evening of artistic performances. Later in the evening, the gathering was disturbed by the arrival of about 150 men garbed in white hats and robes, signifiers of political Islam. Carrying knives, machetes, and clubs, they arrived in a mass of jeeps and motorbikes, and they claimed to

be members of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah* (Ka'bah Youth Movement). They then verbally and physically assaulted many of those present, smashed windows, and destroyed tables and chairs, injuring at least twenty-five people. No-one was charged over the incident. Directed against public events where homosexual men are attempting to stake a claim to Indonesia's civil society, Boellstorff views these kinds of violent acts as a 'masculine' response to a homosexual threat. 'Homophobic' is perhaps another way to describe it. This pattern of state-sanctioned homophobia, according to Boellstorff, indicates that Indonesia may be gaining 'a new masculine cast', where male-to-male sexuality is not only a threat to normative masculinity, but indeed also to the nation itself.

One might ask, why the sudden leap from threatened masculinity to an imminent 'crisis of nation'? The answer to this lies in the relationship between gender and politics in post-colonial Indonesia. There is a substantial body of scholarship suggesting that notions of the ideal Indonesian citizen, particularly from Suharto's New Order era onwards, have been very closely tied in to heterosexual gendered ideologies. The Indonesian state went to great lengths to inculcate the ideal citizen-family structure, where people were indoctrinated with the idea that a 'happy and healthy' nuclear marriage was the ideal. The effect of the 'happy and healthy' nuclear family indoctrination was to create a very narrow vision of heterosexual masculinity and femininity as one of the foundations of society. Because it is through marriage and heterosexuality that the gendered self and nation has been articulated, 'in the new Indonesia, men who publicly appear to make improper choices threaten this gendered and sexualized logic of national belonging' (Boellstorff 2004: 470).

An argument can be made that women who fail to fit the model of the 'faithful housewife' pose a similar threat to the masculine self and nation. This is not a new phenomenon. For example, Suryakusuma observed that the backlash against sex, drugs, and prostitution in the mid-1990s was the sign of an authoritarian regime under threat:

> In the midst of the spate of social, economic and political crises, the clampdown on the sex industry is the easiest, the most sensational and the most hypocritical as it does not touch the fundamental root of social unrest: violence, manipulation and injustice, all of which are condoned, even carried out, by the state.
>
> (Suryakusuma 1994: 18)

Here, we see echoes with the present context of the anti-pornography laws, the new kinds of censorship and the growing culture of Islamist puritanism.

Before expanding on this point, I should mention that Boellstorff quite rightly observes that post-colonial heterosexuality is not only shaped by particular state or national visions, but also 'in ways specific to particular colonial legacies' (Boellstorff 2004: 470). As I briefly mentioned earlier, it

could well be argued that the trauma of the Dutch colonial era lies at the very heart of the masculine turn in post-Suharto Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the recent boom of glossy men's magazines in Indonesia – not to mention several key films tentatively exploring definitions of masculinity – suggests that media agents and advertisers have been quick to capitalize on the commercial potential of this so-called 'masculinist cast' in Indonesia. Many magazine and newspaper articles demonstrate that unabashed discussions of men and men's practices are now under way (Clark 2004a). There are also an increasing number of articles about women's issues, from a male perspective, and indeed several important films by male film-makers focusing on women, such as Riri Riza's *Eliana Eliana* and Hanny Saputra's *Virgin*. This trend, I believe, is suggestive of some Indonesian men's pro-feminist attempts to challenge patriarchal gender relations and construct non-patriarchal subjectivities and practices.[4]

Obviously, by understanding the world of Indonesian men, or at the very least representations of Indonesian masculine behaviour in recent cinema, we can also better understand Indonesian Muslims and the anti-*Playboy* and anti-pornography lobby in particular. In this context, Boellstorff suggests that it is useful to consider emotions such as *malu* (shame), which is very similar in meaning to the Javanese *isin* or Balinese *lek*. The usefulness of using *malu* as an analytical tool is because it might well be that a sense of *malu*, or masculine inferiority, indignation or humiliation is at the heart of the matter. It should be noted that Boellstorff is talking about the feelings of *malu* of normative men (and their vision of the Indonesian nation as normatively male) in response to the sense of threat and embarrassment posed by homosexual activists. However, I believe that feelings of nationalized and masculinized *malu* can be engendered by other groups, including women and the West. *Malu*, in terms of it being a 'nationalized intersection of manhood and emotion' (Boellstorf 2004: 481), surely cannot be merely limited to the threat posed by non-normative men. Indeed, as discussed earlier, in Indonesia a sense of *malu* can be – and has been – engendered by the West, and Western men to some extent, dating back to the social, political and gendered incursions of the Dutch colonial era.

Malu, according to Boellstorff, also has a proper rejoinder:

> the potential for the nation to be represented by non-normative men challenges a nationalized masculinity, enabling what has long been understood to be a normative response to *malu* – namely, the masculine and often collective enraged violence known in Indonesian as *amok*. By definition, *amok* is always a public act.
>
> (Boellstorf 2004: 469).

Again, Boellstorff's argument – based on the perceived conflict between 'normative' and 'non-normative' men – can be easily expanded to include the possibility of other disruptions to the 'normative' masculinist national

discourse. As already outlined, women, the West, and indeed *Playboy* magazines, have the potential to emerge as much greater symbolic ruptures to the post-Suharto vision of the nation than homosexuals. After all, as mentioned earlier, several important films depicting homosexual relationships and male-to-male kissing scenes have emerged since the late-1990s. The salient point to be made is that these films did not provoke the violent reactions associated with the homosexual gatherings beginning in September 1999, or even a single demonstration.

Once the threat posed by non-normative Indonesian men is expanded to encompass other threats to Indonesian public and political culture, Boellstorff's ideas make a great deal of sense. But if we want to use *amok*, a non-English word deriving from a Malay semantic origin, as an analytical tool, a few important points need to be considered. We must be prepared to state from the outset that to be in a state of murderous frenzy, that is, to 'run *amok*', is *not* unique to the people of the Malay/Indonesian world. *Amok* can be an emotion shared by people of all religious persuasions, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities. Therefore, we also need to be careful of placing the blame for Indonesia's culture of violence squarely on certain Indonesian religious or ethnic groups. For example, for a mob of *Front Pembela Islam* members to run *amok* in response to the emergence of an Indonesian *Playboy* is not dissimilar to conservative religious protests against the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, or Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), or more recently Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Likewise, for a few determined militant Islamists to run *amok* with home-made bombs might well be an entirely understandable – and suitably aggressive – masculine response to the West's war on terror. Yet, by the same token, it is not difficult to argue that the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq is an excellent example of a nationalized collective *amok*, a murderous and frenzied response to the shameful September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center!

Ultimately, Boellstorff shies away from providing us with a convincing justification for why he has used non-English words as an analytical tool. Furthermore, he interchanges between the Indonesian *malu* and *amok* and their respective English equivalents, as I do here. Nevertheless, mindful of the necessary analytical adjustments outlined in the previous paragraphs, the remainder of this chapter will draw upon Boellstorff's framework of shifting emotions of nation and masculinity, highlighting the continuum between an embattled sense of manhood and emotional responses such as *amok*. This is because an argument can be made that group emotions of righteous anger and rage, in response to both personal and nationalized masculine shame and indignation, might well have come into play in post-New Order Indonesia.

Returning to the world of Indonesian cinema, we can see the signs of a similar cultural logic. In films such as *Kuldesak*, *Tato* (Tatoo) (2001), *Gerbang 13*, and especially Rudi Soedjarwo's *9 Naga*, we can witness essentially decent men running *amok* in response to poverty, powerlessness, and anger,

with little care for the consequences to themselves or their families. It should be emphasized, however, that the behaviour of characters that run *amok* in Rudi's films can be found across many societies, on and off the screen. Nevertheless, viewed in terms of Boellstorff's theories of emotion – whereby to 'run *amok*' is a violently aggressive response to a sense of personalized, masculinised, and nationalized shame – by briefly examining Rudi Soedjarwo's *9 Naga,* I will suggest that this deplorable pattern becomes understandable, even if it is not unique to Indonesia, and even if it cannot be condoned. Before beginning this discussion, however, it is important to note that well-meaning attempts to create films pointing towards the opposite end of the spectrum of masculine behaviour can appear equally problematic. For example, several recent films that attempt to generate some 'positive' alternative masculine role models are at times overwhelmed by a pained sense of earnestness, and are also not immune to frequent bouts of violence. I will expand on this point by briefly examining an earlier film by Rudi Soedjarwo, *Mengejar Matahari*, which combines mawkish sentimentality with a weak script and clumsy plot, interspersed by episodes of appalling violence. It is significant that more than one film critic has observed that the style and themes of *9 Naga* and *Mengejar Matahari* are quite similar (Diani 2006; Pattisina 2006; Rahman 2006), so a comparison between the two seems logical.

Rudi Soedjarwo's *Mengejar Matahari* and *9 Naga*

In a nut-shell, *Mengejar Matahari* revolves around the bonds of friendship between four boys who have grown up together in one of the poorer suburbs of Jakarta, Ardi (Winky Wiryawan), Apin (Udjo), Damar (Fauzi Baadilla) and Nino (Fedi Nuril). Since they were young boys, growing up in run-down apartments within a few blocks of each other, they played a game: racing each other around the blocks, 'chasing the sun'. The film devotes the majority of its focus on the boys as teenagers, when they are forced to confront the neighbourhood ruffians, a group of *preman* led by the heavily-tatooed Obet (Ade Habibie). Ironically, the group of friends – depicted with lighter skin perhaps to emphasize the tacit understanding that they are 'the good guys'? – are no strangers to violence and intimidation themselves. Damar and Ardi beat each other senseless over a girl, Rara (Agni Arkadewi); Damar savagely punches one of Obet's henchmen as a warning; and Damar, Ardi and Nino are involved in an extremely violent clash with Obet's gang, after Apin was knifed by Obet. The violence is not limited to clashes between the boys and Obet's gang. Throughout the film Damar, who grew up without a father, treats his mother appallingly. He is unable to restrain himself from shouting at her in anger each time she questions his violent behaviour, and by the time of the film's unfortunate climax – depicting Damar's incarceration for his revenge-killing of Obet – it is evident that she has no control over him, and perhaps never did.

Ardi is also prone to violence within his family home, albeit a strain of passive aggression. The film goes to great lengths to reveal the tension between Ardi and his retired police-officer father. Ardi's father is a harsh disciplinarian, who wants his son to follow in his footsteps. Unfortunately, Ardi is an aspiring artist, and he has little interest in joining the police force.[5] They pass each other wordlessly in the narrow steps outside their apartment, or manoeuvre around each other uncomfortably inside the equally claustrophobic apartment. This uneasy silence is broken by episodes where Ardi is either lectured or harshly berated by his father for his delinquent behaviour. Ardi's response is to burn with rage, to cry in shame, and to make crude artistic caricatures of his father (depicted as a fire-breathing ogre dressed in a police uniform). The ultimate response, of course, to this pattern of passive aggression, is to run *amok* by playing a key role in the street-fighting outlined above. Somewhat worryingly, Indonesian film critics have tended not to raise concerns over the appalling amount of violence in the film. Rather, they tend to point out plot flaws, the poor dialogue, the mordant soundtrack, the inconsequential roles for women, the age of the 20-something actors purportedly playing teenagers, and other absurdities. Consider the following telling review by *The Jakarta Post*'s resident film reviewer, Hera Diani:

> ... all four of the men are too old for their parts. Many other aspects of the film do not make sense. It is hard to believe that teenage boys living in a slum area can afford to buy their friend a brand new videocam. And while we expect some silly, macho stuff from testosterone-charged teenage boys, we instead get Ardi crying in his room after a row with his old man. We listen to sage words of wisdom that are so sentimental and mushy that nobody would believe a 16-year-old youth would say such things. Worse still, the story abruptly ends every time Rara walks in. The absurdities build to a climax as the film fast forwards to the future, with Ardi coming home smiling, wearing a police uniform.
>
> (Diani 2004b)

Soedjarwo was not discouraged, however. After the intervening *Tentang Dia* (About Her) (2005), he quickly began work on a similar project to *Mengejar Matahari*, *9 Naga*, which he hoped would help him move beyond the highly lucrative 'teenage coming-of-age' category of his previous films, into a film for adults depicting adult themes, and masculine themes in particular.

Although not a sequel to *Mengejar Matahari*, *9 Naga* is also devoted to the portrayal of the relationships between urban men, and their involvement in criminality. Indeed, the film's emphasis on the twin themes of masculinity and violence emerged before *9 Naga* was even released. In December 2005, the *Lembaga Sensor Film* (Board of Film Censorship) publicly expressed concern over two issues relating to *9 Naga*'s eye-catching poster. One concern

was over the movie's provocative slogan, and the other talking point was the image of a shirtless Fauzi Baadilla, which dominates the poster. The offending slogan, *'Manusia terbaik di Indonesia adalah seorang penjahat'* (The best Indonesian is a criminal), was considered as verging on an incitement to violence and criminal behaviour. Furthermore, with so many law-abiding Indonesian citizens, it was deemed patently untrue. The image of Baadilla was questioned because it revealed his belly-button, as well as a tuft of pubic hair above his jeans. There were unsubstantiated rumours suggesting that the film would be banned as a result of both issues, claims the *Lembaga Sensor Film* strenuously denied (*Kompas* 2005). Other rumours emerged that the media furore was little more than a publicity stunt, aimed at generating interest in the film (Yordenaya 2005). Eventually, the offending slogan was removed from the posters, and the section of the poster revealing Baadilla's nether-regions was discretely deleted (Dian 2005).

The irony is that despite the poster's gangster-ish tagline and its image of a shirtless rough-and-tumble Baadilla, the movie failed to live up to expectations, and it was panned by some critics: 'Turns out it's a snoozefest melodrama that runs a snail's pace and has no connection whatsoever to its title and tagline' (Diani 2006).[6] The film revolves around Marwan (Lukman Sardi), Donny (Donny Alamsyah), and Lenny (Fauzi Baadilla), three childhood friends-turned-hitmen living in an urban slum in Jakarta. The three friends have now 'grown up', and they rail against their harsh new realities. One of them, Donny, wants to come clean, and he opens a silk-screen shop. The others also struggle with inner turmoil, straining between the need to make a decent living, the need to live up to childhood loyalties, and the need to face the demands of their new family situations. Ultimately, the key thematic impulse underpinning the film is that of relationships, and masculine relationships in particular.

Yet the masculine relationships in this film are inscribed in the same way as the shirtless Baadilla poster: as defensive, passive, and emotionally and sensually deprived. Each man abhors his 'career' as a hitman, but is unable to successfully break free. They are also unable to resolve their feelings of guilt and hopelessness. Their daytime lives and relationships, as a result, are empty and banal. Donny, for instance, has his soccer-playing brother to divert his attention, but the relationship between the two brothers is passionless. Fortunately, Donny is accidentally shot by Marwan, and in this sense his suffering is relieved. For his guilt-ridden partners-in-crime, there is no relief. Lenny has an insipid love affair with an inexpressive and uninteresting village girl, but for most of the film he is unable to summon the courage to address her. More importantly, Marwan, the main character of the film, has a loving wife, Ajeng (Ajeng Sardi), and a daughter, yet his relationships with them are strained. Although moments of intimacy are shared, many words are left unspoken. Beyond providing an income, Marwan makes little effort to improve his home life. Indeed, he refuses to reveal where he goes each night, and why he comes home agitated and

drunk, with a pocketful of cash. His disabled wife asks him repeatedly to take his daughter to be immunized; he makes little effort to do it. Later, when confronted outright by his inaction, he angrily refuses to help, and his passive aggression – and melancholy – increases as the film goes on.

It could be argued that Marwan's family is a microcosm of a shift in dominant forms of masculinity in Indonesia. But Marwan is unwilling to let the femininity of his wife and daughter control his masculinity, albeit an increasingly embattled sense of masculinity. His melancholy and his closedness to his wife and daughter are underpinned by the weakening of traditional gender roles among struggling families eking out an existence in metropolitan slums. On the one hand, he is expected to support his family financially, which he does. Yet on the other hand, it is necessary for him to do more, especially as his wife is in a wheelchair, and he spends long periods of time either sleeping-in or moping around the house. He also has redeeming qualities that suggest that he might even *want* to do more, including his wry sense of humour, his fleeting moments of deep affection for his wife, and his obvious love for his daughter. One respected Indonesian film critic, Leila Chudori, observes the following:

> The husband-and-wife scenes between Marwan and his wife, Ajeng, are deeply intimate, deeply sweet, and deeply bittersweet. Their bedroom dialogue (ranging from everyday things such as the discovery of a strand of grey in Ajeng's hair to the problem of their child's immunisation) flows realistically, a realism which hasn't been offered by Indonesian film-makers since the passing of Teguh Karya.
>
> (Chudori 2006)

Yet there is no indication that Marwan's redeeming qualities are underpinned by an open attitude to alternative forms of employment and masculinity. Therefore, his descent into the depths of violent criminality and theft at the conclusion of the film – supposedly so that his family will be able to afford to move out of the city and live in a nice house in the country – is almost predictable. It is also a damning indictment of the marginalization of men in Indonesia's urban environment, where shifting gender patterns inspired by social, political, and economic change mean nothing in the face of the endemic shame and hopelessness of crippling poverty. This also highlights the fact that, for many Indonesian men, if not the majority, their masculine dominance has assumed a benign and uncontested form. The worry with this is that it suggests that masculine violence – be it domestic, political, or religious, personalized or nationalized – will continue unchecked, in a country that is already racked by violence, on-screen and off-screen.

Finally, mindful of the key themes of this book, I believe that we are barely skimming the surface of understanding the social and political import of contemporary Indonesian artistic expression. Furthermore, with the rapid proliferation of socially and political engaged mainstream and

underground Indonesian cinema, the task is growing in relevance and urgency. Even with the anti-pornography debate, the heightened degree of religious puritanism and the ongoing culture of violence, it is difficult to detect any serious threat to the impressive momentum of the history of recent Indonesian cinema. This is especially the case for independent film-making. Certainly the 'new' culture of censorship might well prove to be a challenge for both mainstream and independent film-making in Indonesia. However, if anything, the interconnections between art, politics and society will become more important.

Notes

1 *Ketika* was nominated in four categories of awards in the 2005 Indonesian Film Festival, winning the award for the Best Script, by Musfar Yasin, and lead actor Deddy Mizwar won the Best Actor award in the 2005 Bandung Film Festival.
2 Williams (2006) has noted that there have been a few notable cases where the pornography laws have been arbitrarily enforced, including the gaoling of several models for a few months in 1984 for posing in an erotic calendar. The photographer involved was also gaoled. More recently, in 2001, actress and model Sophia Latjuba was questioned and released without charge after police considered that pictures published of her were allegedly 'seductive'.
3 These fears have also given rise to artworks conveying mischievous comments on this very same transformation, such as Agus Suwage and Davy Linggar's *Pink-swing Park* (Dirgantoro 2006).
4 Measuring the success or failure of these projects, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.
5 Aspects of this fictional father–son relationship might well mirror the relationship between Rudi Soedjarwo and his own father, Anton Soedjarwo, a retired high-ranking police-officer.
6 Of course, some critics poured praise on the film. Consider the following comments: 'when was last time you emerged form a cinema after watching an Indonesian film which made your heart so proud? When was the last time you discussed a film continuously all night without a break? *Ibunda*? *Tjut Nyak Dhien*? *Nagabonar*? *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*? I'm sure it's been a long time. [*9 Naga*] is the next film that will lead to endless discussion. And contemplation. And thinking. Ah, as it turns out Indonesian cinema still has a pulse. Rudi [Soedjarwo] has fulfilled his promise to nurture it' (Chudori 2006). The film was also screened at the prestigious Rotterdam International Film Festival.

3 Changing social formations in Indonesian and Thai teen movies

David Hanan

The rise of the teen movie can be related to the emergence of consumer culture, and particularly of the expanding post-Second World War middle-class culture of the suburbs of the American cities creating an audience of baby boomer teenage consumers interested in movies about themselves. In Indonesia, we see the beginning of teen movies also paralleling the rise of consuming classes throughout the Suharto period, and in Indonesia the teen movie became a cult with the *Si Boy* series of five films made in Indonesia between 1987 and 1991. Discussing the rise of the Thai teen movie, Chaiworaporn also sees teen movies as a new phenomenon for Thai cinema. Such teen movies appeared in the 1980s when there was a shift in audiences for Thai cinema from a predominantly lower and middle-class urban and rural mass audience comprising all age groups, dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, to an audience largely of young people including those from the newly affluent classes (Chaiworaporn 2001: 153–56). The emergence of the Thai teen movie corresponds with the building of large entertainment complexes particularly in Bangkok and other urban centres at the end of the 1980s.

In this chapter, I analyse and compare four examples of teen movies made in Southeast Asia over the last 20 years, two from Indonesia and two from Thailand.[1] There are a number of reasons why such an analysis can reveal information about these societies. First, the ways in which young people are addressed and the ways in which the nation is imaged reveal considerable inside knowledge about a society, particularly its aspirations, values, and dominant social ideologies. Second, a society's values, aspirations, and ideologies change over time. In contemporary Indonesia, such change is related to the fall of the New Order regime. What kinds of new expression became possible with this regime change, and how does this occur? As we shall see, each of the teen movies discussed here has a relation to social ethos and to the dominant ideologies of their societies.

But there are also wider questions about global differences between teen movies that I will consider. For example, in what ways do the Indonesian and Thai films discussed below show similarities to and differences from teen movies made elsewhere, particularly in the USA? Does the adoption of

the teen movie genre necessarily signal the adoption of Western or American values? To what extent are national and regional cultural differences preserved, as well as social ideologies, and to what extent is this preservation of cultural difference an explicit discourse in movies addressed to young people? And if some local or national values are preserved, does this mean that they always need to be explicit and that the films embody what some Southeast Asian leaders have referred to as Asian values?

Here I will argue a number of points. First, some Southeast Asian movies are concerned with reinventing and preserving traditions even as they embrace a culture of the future. What they espouse is different from the Asian values advocated by politicians in the region. Second, that there are significant differences in ideas of the group and particularly in body language, from what one finds in their Western counterparts, even though all these teen movies are concerned with issues of the group and group bonding. Third, the Indonesian movies prioritize youth languages that differentiate between age groups in Indonesia, particularly in Jakarta, while one of the Thai teen movies at a key moment incorporates uses of Royal language. Fourth, none of the Southeast Asian movies examined – even the most consumerist of the films – display anti-intellectualism commonly found in youth culture in the West.

The Films and their Contexts of Production

In 1987, 20 years after Suharto came to power, the Indonesian cinema produced a very successful teen movie, *Catatan Si Boy* ('Boy's Diary'), which ran into four sequels, the final appearing in 1991. Each of these films consistently ranked third- or fourth-most popular film released in the years they appeared (Kristanto 1995: 415). Starring the very funky Onky Alexander, the *Si Boy* films can be read as presenting the teenage ego ideal consonant with the values of Suharto's New Order. Given the lack of importance accorded to story in the series, they show how much the lifestyle of privileged elite in itself can be sufficient subject for a film in a developing country with a growing middle-class and large masses of the poor. The *Si Boy* films embody many of the contradictions of the social formation of Suharto's New Order.

Although the origin and source of Boy's family's wealth is not substantially detailed in the film, Boy clearly is the son of a family from the small circle of the super-rich. As he leaves home early in the first film in the series, we see garaged in the family carpool area a Rolls Royce, a Mercedes Benz, and a BMW. As a young man about town, and a responsible student of economics at a new university, Boy displays key skills that young men of his age desire. For example, he drives his BMW with great skill, successfully using the car to duel with the former boyfriend of his latest girlfriend, to chase down thieves on motorcycles, and even to effectively avoid such dangerous hazards as poor street-traders trying to cross with their carts the

width of the arterial roads newly built by the New Order throughout Jakarta. The film has little coherent structure, being largely organized to link up incidents of this kind, and to show Boy's ability to attract and superficially engage with a series of young women.

Boy has a cool and quietly macho personality. He is praised by one young woman as being like Rambo in his boxing skills. Boy is also devoted to his religion, being depicted frequently in recurring scenes as praying to Allah. Such scenes are often intercut with him exercising either at a gym or in his bedroom. Twice in the film he refuses the sexual advances of potential girlfriends, saying on the second occasion that he is a man of the East and not easily influenced by Western values. The rapid style of editing used in the film, and the discreet though frequent dressing and undressing, ensures constant narcissistic recourse to desirable bodies, consumer objects, and lifestyle tokens. Sen has discussed the way in which the film legitimizes access to unequal wealth in Indonesia, and how the later films are built around desirable First World locations and the franchise of consumer objects (Sen 1991: 146–47).[2] These films simply present us with a cool personality and ego ideal, who enacts a scenario that the film's producers imagine unifies the desires of the young with the aims, values, and financial priorities of the establishment, a curious mixture of the hedonistic and the luxurious with the puritan and the outwardly restrained.

Robison has argued that the evolution of capitalism and the emergence of middle-classes in New Order post-colonial Indonesia are different from that of nineteenth century Europe because so much of Indonesian development in the New Order was dependent upon the state (Robison 1996: 82). We should note that the parents' of Boy's initial girlfriend forbid her to socialize with Boy, on the grounds that if such a relationship were to continue, his ultra-wealthy family may try to influence her father, a senior Suharto government bureaucrat, to accept a bribe. This anti-corruption motif in the film indicates that Boy's family is from a class of entrepreneurs and not from a class of bureaucrats dependent on the state. Nevertheless, we should note that if these are the aspirations of the family of the central character of the film, one of the producers of the *Si Boy* films was Sudwikatmono, a cousin of President Suharto, who included among his many business interests the Sinepleks 21 group of new-style cinemas. With some exceptions, Sudwikatmono favoured the screening of Hollywood films over the national product, and helped lead to the demise, during the early 1990s, of the large Indonesian film industry of the 1970s and 1980s.

What contrasts do we find in the Indonesian cinema of the post-Suharto Reformasi period? One of the really big successes in recent Indonesian cinema is the 2001 teen movie *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* ('What's Up With Love?', director Rudi Soedjarwo), a film that is consciously set in post-Suharto Reformasi Indonesia. Indeed, given the serious decline in production in the Indonesian film industry over the previous 10 years, the film was both a risk and an experiment. The film was made not by a large production

company with financial links to elites in Jakarta, but by a production house established by an enterprising group of young film-makers with links to the film school. They had started out by making children's television programs. The producers had a strong creative as well as financial role in conceptualizing the film, with an aim to make a film that was both a popular success and engaged its audiences in thinking about their society. The story line of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* was work-shopped by its production team over a long period of time and this results in a careful working out of its social ambience and implications (Lesmana 2002: 125–32).

The film tells the story of the ambivalent romance between two budding poets, Cinta (in Indonesian the word means 'love'), and Rangga, who wins a poetry competition. The film becomes an engaging exploration of teenage ambivalence, as Cinta comes to face the fact that she is smitten by Rangga whom she initially decided was an arrant bore, and who admittedly had been quite rude to her. At the film's opening, Cinta is contextualized as a member of a closely bonded group of teenage girls, their bonding expressed both in their body language and in the pledges of loyalty and support they make to one another. This pledge plays a role in the film as it develops. One sub-plot deals with Cinta's inconsistent support for her friend Alia, who is the victim of domestic violence and who eventually attempts suicide. The nature of the girls' group, and the striking ways in which members express their bond through body language, will be discussed as key ways in which the film explores visually aspects of the cultural specificity of Indonesia.

While the students are mainly from wealthy families, and live in an upper-middle-class Jakarta suburb, political concerns of the film are expressed in the minor sub-plot dealing with Rangga's father, a middle-level government bureaucrat who, during the Suharto years, openly opposed government corruption and lost his job as a result. The political concerns of the film are also expressed through the thematic of Rangga's hero-worship of the poet of the independence period, Chairil Anwar. The film repeatedly foregrounds the book about Anwar that Rangga is reading. It is a screenplay for a film based on Anwar's life, written by the talented and politically radical Indonesian film director of the 1970s and 1980s, Sjumandjaya. One of the most distinctive aspects of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is its use throughout of contemporary Jakarta teenage language, known as *bahasa gaul*.

A Thai teen movie made 10 years earlier, *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* ('When In Trouble, Get Away Fast: That's What Dad Teaches Us', Somjing Srisuphab, 1991), forms a contrast and comparison with *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* To some extent, it deals with similar themes of the adolescent group, but in a Thai context, and this time with a group of boys. This film was also spectacularly successful within the marketplace, and its success ensured that teen movies would become the dominant genre of the 1990s (Chaiworaporn 2001: 155).

Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai opens with a scene of anonymous students misbehaving on a crowded central Bangkok bus, implying that these are

average Thai high school students. However, the film's main location was the distinctive old buildings of 'Suan Kulap' (Rose Garden) High School in Central Bangkok, a high school set up by the late nineteenth century reforming Thai king, Chulalongkorn. The school pioneered mass education in Thailand, and students at this school would be aware of this significant heritage. At the centre of the film is a group of male students in their graduation year, who have formed a gang which they call 'The Rolling Stones'. This gang has developed a reputation for its pranks, irresponsibility, failure to learn, and even for its occasional playful stand-over tactics.

The film is sympathetic to the idea that the headiness of adolescence is related to physical changes that can produce hyperactivity. Ideas related to this are illustrated in some school lessons early in the film. While the adolescent posturing of 'The Rolling Stones' gives them a few admirers, the film also shows them as often immature and self-indulgent, despite the personal loyalties within the group, and their aspirations to be 'with it'. These boys have unresolved problems with their families and in their limited love-lives, and about their futures. They come from various social backgrounds, with the central character, Kan, being the son of a shopkeeping family living above their shop. Others are children of businessmen and professionals.

The turning point for 'the group' comes when, having been interviewed in a shopping mall by a TV program, they discover to their horror, on watching the show at home with their respective parents, that the TV crew had earlier caught them creating a disturbance in a pool room and secretly filmed this. At this point the need for change in attitudes becomes clear. Young women preparing the school play get them to contribute to it, the stylized and formal *Madanabadha*, written early in the twentieth century by the Thai king, Vajiravudh (1880–1925).[3] In this context, each group member discovers a creative area in which he can work. The film culminates in the performance of the play. After the school play, the auditorium is taken over for a rock concert. We discover later on that one member of the group, Kroy, the intellectual who has a stammer, has been cured of his stammer by his performance in the play. The film moves towards its conclusion, which dramatizes feelings of loss on leaving school, particularly the loss of camaraderie with one's friends, and of the freedom from responsibility for one's future, which is now seen as beginning.

A more recent Thai teen movie, *Girlfriends* (2003), has only an English title, which in the film's credits is spelled using Thai characters to represent the sounds of the English words. *Girlfriends* is set in a school, but not one with a historical link to the royal patronage. It is a modern girls' school attended by the well-heeled upper-middle-class, including the daughter of an ultra-rich corrupt businessman. The school is of a modern architectural style, and its modernist, geometric, secular global style has few associations with Thai royalty or Buddhist institutions. Apart from their ultra-modern school, the girls inhabit a world of shopping malls, cinemas and fast-food restaurants, bedrooms filled with soft toys, and cars moving them between

these places. But they are an upbeat group of people full of enthusiasm for each other and they take an active interest in events around them, including television news, with news updates affecting their own circle instantly communicated to each other by telephone.

Like *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?*, the theme of *Girlfriends* is friendship and bonding between a group of girls. Although there is a brief romantic interest, momentarily important late in the film, it remains secondary to the relationships between the girls, who are about 14 years old. From an interview with the director included in the DVD, one aim of the film was to look at a very particular age-group of young people and to set out to be positive in telling them who they are. In the opening scene, three girls from the group outwit a mall security guard who is attempting to molest their fourth member, Nuui, while interrogating her on a trumped-up charge of shoplifting. The film emphasizes both the vulnerability of the 14-year-olds and how enterprising they can indeed be to affect change. The film sees them as at a special age, as on the point of engaging with adult life but still needing to work together to do so.

Each of the girls is individuated to a degree. Bi sees herself as a budding writer, following in the footsteps of her widowed father, an established writer. Dtim comes from a very wealthy family, but her father is about to be publicly exposed for corrupt business practices. Tum, a tomboy, is the only one with a decisive interest in boys, and this brings her into conflict with Nuui, after an immature young man, Deang, clumsily makes approaches to both of them. On hearing that Tum has destroyed Nuui's mobile phone when shown Deang's phone number on it, Bi surreptitiously aggresses Tum, knocking her over during a basketball match. The plot is resolved in an extended reconciliation scene between all four girls at the luxurious home of Dtim, whose father is about to be arrested. While each of the girls is individuated, the film does not prioritize any of the girls and there is no main character in the film, each of the girls is allowed a comparable parallel importance.

Girlfriends contains a deliberate reference to *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai*. This becomes evident in a scene where the girls see themselves on television, in this case when they are being taken from the mall to the police station after the incident with the security guard. However, in contrast to the earlier movie, where seeing themselves on TV is traumatic for the boys, in *Girlfriends* the girls see both their potentially transgressive exploits in saving their wrongly accused friend, and their subsequent appearance on television as participants in an 'incident', as a victory. They cheer themselves, in keeping with the upbeat mood of the film.

The Relation to the American Genre

While historically the rise and the popularity of the teen movie are related to the emergence of the teenager as a consumer, the genre itself reflects the

diversity and change of teenage popular culture. Rather than being seen as simply another form of capitalist consumption, we should note that the best teen movies explore in an engaging manner the special character and the diversity of adolescent experience as a particular phase in human experience. A range of different sub-genres within the American teen movie, based on the kinds of experience they characteristically examine, has recently been defined by Speed. Three are of pertinence to the Southeast Asian films: the teen romance, the *rite de passage* or nostalgic teen movie, and teen movies with characters inhabiting spaces of transition.

The recent Indonesian teen movie *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* can unequivocally be placed in the sub-genre of teen romance (American examples being John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles* and Amy Keckerling's *Clueless*). In contrast with vulgar teen comedy, argues Speed, the teen romance can be linked specifically with femininity (Speed 1998a: 107). Elsewhere, Speed invokes feminist critic Mary Anne Doane's arguments to the effect that the love story or romantic melodrama is seen to engage in a 'fetishization of affect' which results in naked displays of emotion (Doane 1987: 96). Excessive emotion might be seen as a response to the needs of women in patriarchal society, and to be a response to their oppression. In romance as well, males are feminized, but in teen romance the theme of inexperience is less gendered than in adult-centred genres: 'As romantic hero the adolescent male is not only subject to feminization, but he also lacks the masculine traits of social and sexual mastery' (Speed 1996: 190).

But *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is comedy not melodrama, and its comic edge arises from the sharp-edged recognition of the problems of emotional ambivalence, and recognition of how to read signs of romantic involvement in oneself and in others. In *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?*, both the drama and the comedy arise not only from Cinta's intense emotions, as she encounters Rangga, and denies her feelings for him, but also in the depiction of her gradual recognition that she does have feelings for him and her intelligent attempts to come to terms with them, and to control her relationship with someone for whom her desire is almost threatening. Rangga, on the other hand, is both a sensitive romantic outsider, and someone who is obtuse to her feelings in many of their encounters. It is only in the conclusion of the film, at Jakarta International Airport, that they accept their need for each other, as Rangga at this point is about to depart for the USA for family reasons. The film ends on an intense, but fulfilling, separation and on expectations for the future in the promises Rangga leaves for Cinta in a poem he gives her as he departs.

In accordance with the sub-genre of the teen romance, music, and even poetry, play an important role in anticipating oceanic feelings of fulfillment. But one of the limitations of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* is that the poetic talent presented in the film is ultimately that of Rangga, with Cinta responding to his poetry, rather than he to hers. There is little admiration in the film on Rangga's part for any poem written by Cinta—her poem, recited

early in the film, is recited only for her girlfriends. In this sense, the woman is denied an active social role as a potential artist, while this role is ceded to the male. Nevertheless, the portrait of emotional ambivalence in both Cinta and Rangga is very subtly charted in the film.

There is no central romance organizing the narrative of *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai*. This film falls between two types of teen films as defined by Speed: the last third of the film might be seen as an example of the nostalgic teen film or *rite de passage* film, which takes nostalgic leave of this phase in life as the teenagers see it is coming to an end (Speed 1998b: 24).[4] But the first half of *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* at least, is a celebration of adolescence as a series of acts of rebellion and the inhabiting of 'spaces of transition', not unlike Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* (1993). In her article, Speed cites Grossberg's argument about the importance, for the adolescent, of spaces of transition:

> If society located the body of youth in the space of domesticity, consumption and education (with any transgressions resulting in specific sites of incarceration for the youthful offender) then youth could construct its own places in the space of transition between these institutions: in the street, around the jukebox, at the hop (and later, at the mall) ... What the dominant society assumed to be no place at all – merely a transition – became the privileged site of youth's investment.
> (Grossberg 1992: 179).

For Speed, the transitionary and spatial aspects of adolescence, important for celebrating the hedonism of teen culture, are reflected in a teen movie such as Linklater's *Dazed and Confused*, where 'what might appear to be an unstructured narrative is organized around the characters' gravitation toward "spaces of transition"' (Speed 1998b: 28). Two important scenes in *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* are located in spaces of transition. The first is the opening scene on the crowded bus where the central character, Kan, claims he has been molested by a fellow male passenger, in effect a school friend and he is staging a charade. The second is the fight in the mall pool parlor, which is followed by the interview on television. There are numerous other such scenes in transitional spaces. But in the last third of the movie we move to the *rite de passage* sub-genre, where, as Speed argues, 'a formulaic use of narrative closure is equated with the teenager's acquisition of maturity, and accompanying loss of adolescent freedom' (Speed 1996: 23). The key events that structure the second half of the film are set up to make the young men confront an adult world, and this is associated with a formulaic use of narrative closure. In the concluding scenes of the film, Kan, despite his immaturity, is seen to establish a relationship with a young woman from his school who has admired him from a distance. At the end of the film the two of them visit a *wat* (Thai temple) and kneel before the altar on which the image of the Buddha is exposed.

Girlfriends combines elements of an incipient teen romance, but it also has elements of the spaces of transition sub-genre. In this film, even the publicity of the arrest of Dtim's father is a space of transition for Dtim. The contrast with the American teen movie is the nature of the bonding and the friendships that exists between the teenagers. In the American films *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *16 Candles*, male bonding takes the form of peer group pressure to show heterosexual achievement. In both, a central character has an advisor in the form of an older, more experienced, and ostensibly more romantically, successful male friend. Recently, the issue of bonding has been discussed by Kearney (2002), who argues that in the 1990s we see the emergence of teen movies about girls that no longer base personal development and adolescent growth entirely within a framework or ideology of heterosexual romance. Rather they embody feminist themes within their narratives, depicting for example the need for girls to grow and to develop 'confidence, assertiveness and self respect' independently of boys, and sometimes, though not always, via same-sex relationships. This often occurs in response to the girls' awareness of their exploitation within heterosexual relationships (Kearney 2002: 125).

At the centre of both *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* and *Girlfriends* are the teenage female group and the relationships in the group. In this sense, they share some of the characteristics of the films discussed by Kearney. However, neither of these Southeast Asian films includes a lesbian romance and in both films the close female group pre-exists any designated bad heterosexual experience and is valued in itself. Moreover, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* integrates its view of the importance of the female group with the development of a heterosexual teen romance for its central protagonist. Both close bonding of a female group, and heterosexual romance, are present and important in this film.

Social Specificity and the Global Cultural Differences

The two of the films just discussed are particularly interesting in the ways they map themselves explicitly in relation to the social order of their country and its history, recent or distant. In each case they do this differently, each embodies aspects of the social specificity of its nation. But there are also characteristics that some of these films share, which might be seen as distinctive features and/or discourses of Southeast Asian societies. The first characteristic is the importance of the group and of discourses about the group. The second is the visually distinctive group body language, found most strikingly in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* but also in *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai*, and *Girlfriends*. The third characteristic is a concern with linguistic variety. Fourth, and finally, is a concern with inventing or re-affirming tradition and a willingness to incorporate aspects of high culture or state-sanctioned official culture in parts of a film, as one way of mapping a relation to the society. Not all of these features are found in all of the films.

Nevertheless, each merits discussion to some degree for they are different from what is generally found in films from the USA.

A contrast between *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* and *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* reveals different ways in which teen movies may map themselves in relation to the social order, and exhort their teenage audiences to relate responsibly to their society. Both of these films have idealistic elements, relating to overall conceptions of social integration or political change. In the case of the Indonesian movie, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?*, the post-Suharto 'Reformasi' period is clearly indicated by the difficult position of Rangga's father, who has been sacked because he criticized aspects of corruption in the Suharto government. Rather than the heedless hedonism of the *Si Boy* films of the late 1980s, the young people are encouraged to have some social idealism through the example of the film director, Sjumandjaya. Before him there was Chairil Anwar, the two figures linked in the film via the screenplay Sjumandjaya wrote in the early 1980s for a film biography of Anwar (Sjumandjaya 1987). Three of the films that Sjumandjaya wrote and directed were critical of emerging tendencies in the New Order. He also made historical films, and in some key works, either celebrated the vitality and cultures of his own people or expressed concern about the loss of cultural values with modernization. So his films always had some overall social purpose. Chairil Anwar himself is known for his all-consuming involvement in the Indonesian revolution, his poetry giving expression to many levels of the society in this period of intense social and political change.

By highlighting the achievements of these culture heroes and by relating them to each other *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* can be considered as inventing a tradition, drawing attention to these figures as a way of reminding students of things other than the consumerism that surrounds them in upper-middle-class contemporary Indonesian society. One of the traditions the film is espousing is a sense of the history of Indonesian cinema. A key figure such as Sjumandjaya is also being commemorated at a time when the Indonesian cinema, as a mass phenomenon, had almost ceased to exist.

In the case of the Thai film, the mapping to aspects of a wider social order is found in the performance of the school play, written by King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). Of the role played by the cultural initiatives of the Thai kings, Baker and Phongpaichit have outlined how throughout the nineteenth century a succession of Thai kings made efforts to retrieve and rebuild in Bangkok the court culture of the destroyed capital Ayutthaya, encouraging the re-staging with Western stagecraft of dance and drama performances based on the Indian epic, the Ramayana (Baker and Phongpaichit 2005: 71–72). This frequently involved the kings themselves composing dramas and poems, the poems based on themes in Sanskrit literature. The play by King Vajiravudh is a good example of the role of certain kinds of literature in fashioning an expanded Thai official culture during the period of the strengthening of the Thai state. This was initiated as a response to the threats of the surrounding colonizing powers of

England and France during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century.

By encouraging the young males' creativity, the staging of the play has a key role in shifting the film from the sub-genre of spaces of transition, to the sub-genre of *rite de passage* nostalgic narrative, and initiates the turn to maturity in the characters. But we should note that the performance of the play is intercut repeatedly by scenes of a basketball match. The staging of the play also contains elements of irony as well: a large backdrop of the sun has a 'no smoking area' sign under it, but this large sun is also a face with a cigarette in the corner of its mouth. The film emphasizes a plurality of voices and cultural positions, rather than simply stressing one. It invokes a tradition, but it relativizes it at the same time, acknowledging that many young people are likely to have different interests and priorities, yet at the same time affirming the presence of the Thai kingship and its continuing role in the 1990s as a significant element in the contemporary Thai social order.

The mapping of the social order in these two films relates very much to differences between the social situations in Indonesia and Thailand. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* contains an excellent example of Jakarta-specific body language in its opening scene. Here, Cinta and her group of young women comfort Alya who describes recent violence to which she and her mother have been subjected. The young women surround Alya to comfort her, creating a moment of group identity and bonding which is distinctive both in its physical closeness and in the apparent spontaneity with which it comes into being. I can find no examples of this kind of body language in any American teen movie. However, this kind of body language is found in the carvings on the Buddhist *stupa* at Borobodur, showing court women in Central Java in the ninth century AD. In the closeness and proximity of the intertwining, one might expect a sexual component, but this body language is not an invitation to sexuality. It displays the relaxed way in which physical contact can be meaningful for Indonesian teenagers without having immediate sexual repercussions.

The attempt to depict the intense bonding and the different sensory world that is part of daily experience for groups of teenage Indonesian girls was part of the project of the film.[5] This female bonding and discourse of the group that we find in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* and *Girlfriends* provides a significant counter-example to the material discussed by Kearney about the emergence in the USA in the 1990s of teen movies that prioritize female bonding that situate their relationships in heterosexual romance. In both the Indonesian and Thai films, female bonding, both at the level of discourse and in the imaging of body language, co-exists alongside the possibility of heterosexual romance, rather than replacing it.

In so far as such bonding exists between heterosexual American women, it might be suggested that, in fact, the American teen movie largely represses it as a dimension of female teenage experience. On the other hand, the

claim that Indonesians generally are more group-oriented has been made before in writings in anthropology and in film and visual studies. Heider argues about the importance of the group orientation of Indonesians in his discussion of patterns of culture in Indonesian film narratives (Heider 1991: 30–34). Bateson and Mead analyse the group body language and the touch culture of the Balinese as early as 1942 in their lengthy study *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (Bateson and Mead 1942: passim).

In the earlier Thai film, the core group ('The Rolling Stones') is male. Here, the most striking representation of group identity is found not early in the film, but very late in the film. In one of the valedictory scenes, the teenagers are conscious that their schooldays and their lives together are coming to an end. The male students squat on the ground in a line, and with affection write messages to each other on the back of the shirt of the person in front of them. The camera tracks laterally along this line of physical contact, observing this ritual of farewell as also a ritual celebrating closeness and bonding, even as they part.

We may note that this instance of group body language in the Thai film is more indirectly expressed and less clearly emphasized than it is in the Indonesian movie. Unlike the latter, it does not come at the opening of the film, but towards the end, and in context motivated by the valedictory moment of separation; from here on these students will not be together but are expected to become individuals. The differences in representation are clearly related to the fact that the bonding is between males rather than between females, where physical affection tends to be more accepted and more consciously engaged with. Nevertheless, the body language in this scene in the Thai film is not found in American teen movies. For example, the staging of the valedictory scene at the end of *Dazed and Confused*, where individuated male teenagers, some of them embracing their girlfriends, lie on the sports ground at some distance apart, and reminisce, is substantially different from that in *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* in terms of gender relations and of relation of individual to group.

Youth Language

A further distinctive feature of some of these films is their explicit preoccupation with language and linguistic diversity, and the way this reflects aspects of the social formation they depict. This is most notable in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?*, where the production team set out to ensure that the Jakarta dialect used by the group of girls in the film reflected the most recent developments in teenage slang. *Catatan Si Boy* also uses Jakarta dialect that is derived from the language of the Betawi, the so-called original inhabitants of Jakarta. It is noted for its earthy, pungent, humorous, democratic, and informal expression (Anderson 1990: 42). In the 1970s, Betawi language was celebrated as a language of the poor in the songs and films of Benyamin S, a key figure in Indonesian popular culture. But in the

world of teenagers, Jakarta dialect has also been subject to conscious modification, with the evolution in the 1970s and 1980s of a private language, *bahasa prokem*, an argot originally used by criminals in the drug scene in the 1960s, transferred by street kids to students and young people, who used it as a private language that marked them as different from their parents (Chambert Loir 1984: 115).

In the 1990s, a new variant of the language appears, *bahasa gaul* (from the verb 'bergaul', to socialize), used extensively by gays and transvestites.[6] The language used by the girls combines elements of Jakarta dialect borrowings from Hokkien (*gue* and *lu* for I and you), *bahasa prokem* (the invented terms *bokap* and *nyokap* instead of *bapak* and *ibu* for 'mother' and 'father') with elements of *bahasa gaul* (for example the Anglicism *plese dong*), and this gives their dialogue an intimacy, an informality, and a jazzy disrespectfulness that marks them as a fashionable, very much with it, separate group. On the other hand, Rangga, the love interest who is a loner, writes his poetry in formal Indonesian, and speaks to Cinta and the others almost exclusively in formal Indonesian. All this stresses his earnestness and his own wish to be differentiated from the fashions of those who speak *bahasa gaul*. In addition to stressing the private languages of teenagers, the film makes use of the standard linguistic differentiations marking class and region of origin that one would expect to find in any film. The school janitor, for example, who is obviously from the poorer classes, speaks Indonesian with a Javanese accent, and with some Betawi expressions.

While in the two Indonesian movies we have the rich teenagers speaking a fashionably democratic language, in the Thai film *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* we have standard central Thai spoken throughout the film. In the play performed by the students, there is a powerful allusion to the discursive field of esoteric royal languages and traditional court aesthetics. The play by King Rama VI, *Madanabadha*, is a set text in upper high schools in Thailand, for those who choose to specialize in Thai literature. Only a short section of the play is shown in the film, a highly romantic scene where King Jayasena goes in search of the rose woman, Madana, calling out to her until he meets her and both invoke the coming dawn. The usually stuttering teenager Kroy, playing the role of Jayasena, is dressed in an Indian turban and wears a Thai silk shirt. There is an element of the feminine in the gentleness and politeness of his mode of address, and in the beauty of his costume and the eloquence of his gestures. We may read this along lines suggested by Doane in her feminist reading of romance as emotional excess (discussed earlier). However, this character's feminine characteristics are more consonant with ideas of noble love and the gendering found in a traditional character such as Arjuna (from the Indian epics *Mahabharata*) who conventionally combines both male and female characteristics (Anderson 1965: 13).

An examination of the speech of the characters shows that both use highly poetic language of a kind that will probably only be fully understood

by someone who has formally studied the play at school. For example, the words *sunnari*, *wannadee*, and *yuwadee*, all of which are ways of referring to a woman, would probably be only fully understood by someone who had studied the play. Furthermore, not only poetic language but also elements of Thai royal language (*rachasap*) are deployed in forms of address and some nouns used by Madana in addressing King Jayasena (Smalley 1994: 54–66). This play introduces a different register of language and feeling into the rowdy adolescent ethos of the school.

As noted earlier, the play's relevance to the teenagers appears qualified by the repeated cuts to the very different ethos of the vigorous competitive basketball game, but the cuts also work to foreground this difference of register, and to emphasize different qualities of feeling. It is after the performance (and the curtain falls) has ended that Kroy's male friends rush to embrace and congratulate him, and discover that he has lost his stammer as a result of his performance of poetic language in the play. Absurd and surprising as this is, we should note that, in terms of narrative structure, this moment is a turning point in the film, an important marker of the general improvement in the fortunes of the characters, an improvement that typifies the later section of this film. At this point in the film, we have a sudden integration of a commonly occurring narrative function of the teen movie genre (the rehabilitation of the nerd or the outsider) with Thai official culture, as the royal play and its language become the transforming agent that rescues the outsider and integrates him more fully with the group.

Conclusion

In this survey of two Indonesian and two Thai teen movies made over a 15-year period, a number of points emerge, both with regard to their portraits of their own societies and in contrast with American teen movies. At the height of the New Order period, we find the most popular Indonesian teen movie built around an individual hero, whose life becomes a spectacle celebrating the lifestyles of the rich in a way that is uncritical of excess in consumption and acquisition. At the same time, the film is conservative in its view of sexual behaviour and supports a vaguely defined, opportunistic and contradictory Asian values agenda in contrast to the West. In the post-Suharto Reformasi period, the most popular Indonesian movie so far, also a teen movie, has as its central protagonists a group of young people who are well-off but by no means from the super-rich class depicted earlier. Moreover, in this film, while there is no Asian values agenda, there is a systematic concern with linguistic and cultural specificity. There is even a concern with inventing traditions to promote idealism in the Indonesian youth, and a clever attempt to achieve this for a mass audience, by using a mass audience teen movie genre.

In the Thai teen movie made early in the 1990s, the students at a central Bangkok high school are from a variety of strata in the society. The

underlying aimlessness of the male adolescent characters is confronted, and some direction is given not only by young women, but also by official royal culture of the Thai state, which acts as a kind of integrative focus. In this way, there is a sense of the role the monarchy plays as an integrator of Thai society. In the later Thai film, there appears to be no feeling of a need to relate the young female characters to the Thai state. While the young women in the film are from families that seem to experience no financial concerns (they are young, upbeat, secular consumers, whose life as consumers in the urban metropolis seems an end in itself), the film espouses almost a feminist cause, focusing on potentially vulnerable young women. This emphasizes their integrity and potentiality, and it celebrates the values of group bonding as a way of making young women confident and able agents of change.

A number of key points emerge in the contrast with American teen movies. First, I have argued that the discourse of the same-sex group is a key feature in three of these Southeast Asian films, and this same-sex group bonding plays a greater role in these films than is apparent in the key American movies discussed. In the latter, peers play a role as mentors into heterosexual encounters, and engage in shared activities, but the group rarely appears as a strongly bonded entity to be valued in itself. Related to this is the body language of the group, particularly in the films where a group of women are the central characters. In the Southeast Asian films, the touch-culture body language and sensory world is particularly apparent, and this is also present even among males. I have argued further that whereas bonding between women in the American cinema is discussed by Kearney as an alternative to heterosexual romance, in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* and in *Girlfriends*, at least incipiently, close bonding between young women co-exists with the possibility of heterosexual romance. Indeed, it might be suggested that close bonding between young heterosexual American women is, by and large, repressed in the American teen movie.

In *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* the bonding between the girls in the group is also expressed by their pervasive use of the teenage language *bahasa gaul*. This language is less used in encounters with strangers or outsiders. Interest in languages, and linguistic diversity and choice, does manifest itself in Southeast Asian teen movies, so that its use is part of the representation of cultural specificity. In none of the Southeast Asian teen movies discussed is anti-intellectualism a lasting feature of the films, and only in *Kling Wai Kon Phor Son Wai* is resistance to education a theme of the film. Indeed, two of the Southeast Asian movies incorporate elements of high culture or state official culture as key components of the films. The makers of *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* remind their audiences of traditions of poetry-writing and film-making in Indonesia, while the earlier of the two Thai teen movies, at a number of points, incorporates and dramatizes aspects of the official royal culture of the Thai state.

Notes

1 I wish to thank Santima Devahastin and Kamjohn Louiyaphong for advice about aspects of the languages used in the Thai film, and Basoeki Koesasi for advice about aspects of the languages used in the Indonesian film.
2 The location of Boy's home in the film is reputed to be that of Sudwikatmono, Suharto's cousin. Two of the later films were shot overseas, one in Los Angeles and another in Sydney.
3 For an account of King Vajiravudh's involvement in Thai drama see Rutnin (1996: 157–79). There appears to be no English translation of the play *Madhanabadha*; however, recently the play was adapted as an opera, and the plot of the opera can be accessed online (Foreign Office 2005).
4 Other examples are *American Graffiti*, *Stand by Me* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High,* and the Australian film *The Year My Voice Broke.*
5 In response to my question about how deliberate was the depiction of culturally specific body language in this film, the co-producer of the film replied: 'We were very aware that, for example, the Indonesian female high school students have a tradition of forming a chick gang – and all generations seem to have had it from the '70s to the present. We researched this just by exchanging stories, and especially used the girls in the films as our source of ideas for scenes. They had their own way of using "High Five" and secret meetings. "High Five" is when two or more characters agree to something and they put their hands together. I should say that this "gank culture" [gang culture] is very universal amongst all generations of high school students in Indonesia, and the film became very popular because of this, even for adults, many of whom found the film very affecting, arousing nostalgia for their own teen years' (Riza 2005a).
6 This language is documented in the small dictionary of *bahasa gaul*, originally published in 1999 (Sahertian 2003).

4 Citizenship and Indonesian ethnic Chinese in post-1998 films

Ariel Heryanto

> Tan Peng Liang: 'The important thing is, when Indonesia gets its independence, and all of you occupy important positions in the government, never forget me. I want to live peacefully, no worrying, with my family'.[1]
>
> (Sylado 1999: 360)

In the mid-1990s, I examined the curious absence of ethnic Chinese in the official corpus of Indonesian national literature, and the absence of any mention of the social tensions that arise from the unsettling position of this ethnic minority (Heryanto 1997). By 'official corpus', I mean the 70-year-old literary tradition, officially recognized as the nation's literary heritage, produced and circulated among state officials and intelligentsia, and used in textbooks approved for use in schools. According to the official history, such literature began in the 1920s under the auspices of the colonial – subsequently nationalized – publishing house, Balai Pustaka.

The absence is striking in the face of several facts.[2] Traditions of 'social engagement' and a heavy dose of didacticism have been strong elements in modern Indonesian literature. The issue has always been prominent in public consciousness following many decades of controversy over the legal, moral, and economic status of the ethnic Chinese minority. There was no restriction (official or otherwise) on dealing with sensitive themes in literary works; after all, Indonesian artists and writers have long enjoyed a privileged licence to break taboos, and gained credibility from doing so. The absence also sits awkwardly in the writing of various categories[3] where the subject matter features prominently. These categories include non-fiction writings, as well as fiction that lies outside the category of official Indonesian literature. The latter is comprised of works that are 'disparaged' or deemed 'unworthy' (for example, 'pop' or 'entertainment' literature in recent times, and thousands of titles from the late nineteenth century disparaged as politically, linguistically, and aesthetically 'undesirable' by state officials and intellectual elites); works that were banned by colonial and post-colonial governments (best exemplified by the works of Indonesia's best-known fiction writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer); and works written in various ethnic languages.

Since 1998, we have seen a dramatic emergence of works that fill in this long-standing lacuna (see Cohen 2002; Samudera 2002; Allen 2003; Heryanto 2004a; Hoon 2004; Sen 2006). But we must quickly add that the formal ending of the New Order that year is neither the sole nor the most important cause of the change. The racialized violence against the ethnic Chinese in May 1998 (more to follow below) was a more important factor than President Suharto's resignation in triggering the trend. In what appears to be a response to the violence, a new recognition of Chinese Indonesians and their long history of civil predicaments has become one of the most popular features in contemporary literature, fine arts, and films.

It must be noted that instead of simply filling a gap in the old category of 'official literature', the aesthetic configuration since 1998 has transformed the overall categorization. Banned literature is now widely available and reprinted. The disparaged 'pop' literature that circulates in the cultural pages of newspapers and magazines has gained more prestige and authority, making the distinction between popular and 'official' literature difficult or meaningless. Established writers have also published in these pop media. Some of these works have been republished in anthologies, and well-respected critics are offering serious comments on them.

This chapter will assess the political significance of the new developments, analyzing the depictions of the ethnic minority in two films, *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) and *Gie* (2005), in the light of two main questions. First, what changes, if any, have taken place in the attitudes and views towards the ethnic minority as circulated in the public sphere, and particularly within this form of pop culture? More specifically, I am interested to see whether or not the long-standing and fatalist conception of ethnicity as something that comes with birth, being hereditarily 'in the blood' and following patrilineal line, (rather than a politically charged social construct) persists or is being challenged. Second, what changes, if any, can we find in the views and understanding of nationhood, and the position of this ethnic minority within it? I am interested to see if there is any stronger or weaker sense of nationhood as a modern, collective, and incomplete project of a plural society rather than a privileged heritage belonging naturally to sections of that society by virtue of being the natives or *pribumi*.[4]

In an attempt to answer a similar question, Krishna Sen acknowledges some 'openness of current Indonesian culture and politics'. However, as she notes, while such openness provides 'the necessary condition for re-imagining the Chinese Indonesians, [it] does not ensure a radical shift in a politics of representation' (2006: 171). In her analysis, the dominant prejudice and racist biases persist in post-1998 Indonesian films. In the last section of her article, Sen looks closely at the portrayal of the Chinese Indonesian protagonist Tan Peng Liang in the film *Ca-bau-kan*, leading her to the conclusion that:

> In post-Suharto Indonesia, if the son of a Chinese man can now be recuperated into Indonesian citizenship via the love for his indigenous

> mother and his son's indigenous mother, then it is still only a permanently second-class, politically muted, citizenship.
>
> (Sen 2006: 182)

Sen correctly claims that 'no substantial research on the place of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesian cinema' has yet been published (Sen 2006: 171). Building on some of the significant findings and insight of Sen's inspiring article that surveys 'the presence, the erasure and the absent-presence of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority from the establishment of a film industry in Indonesia in the 1930s' (Sen 2006: 171), what follows focuses on the most recent films. Unlike Sen's article that examines what happened both on and behind the screen in the film production, my scope is much narrower, focusing largely on what appears on the screen against the background of Indonesia's rules pertaining to citizenship laws. In a sense, this chapter begins where Sen's article ends. I will re-examine both Sen's (2006) assessment of *Ca-bau-kan* and my own earlier views on the same film (Heryanto 2004a). I will also look at more recent films that came into circulation after Sen's manuscript went to press, primarily *Gie* (which she mentions in her final endnote, almost as a postscript). But before that, it is imperative that readers are informed of the broader socio-political environments where the new changes took place, and what the preceding situation was like, in order to appreciate the degree of the social changes that have taken place since 1998.

After Authoritarianism

In May 1998, the world witnessed the formal demise of Indonesia's New Order government, then the world's most durable authoritarian regime outside the socialist bloc. Naturally, immediately before and after, there was a wide range of speculations and expectations of what changes would unfold in the world's fourth-most populous nation, promising to be the world's third-largest democracy.

Less than five years later, the process of democratization had lost its momentum. Although Indonesia will never be the same again, and some significant political change has taken place (see Heryanto 2004b; Heryanto and Hadiz 2005), the project of building civil society and democratization has broken down prematurely. Former politicians and cronies of the New Order have returned to dominate strategic positions. The economic recovery has been uncertain and frustratingly slow. While many loathe the thought of the return of the old discredited politicians,[5] various polls and surveys suggest a rise of popular nostalgia for the New Order's 'good old days' when the economy appeared more viable, and mass violence appeared much more limited in scope and intensity.[6]

Such depressing accounts dominate the media both in Indonesia and abroad, making it difficult for many to recognize and appreciate transformations that have taken place in a few selected areas. The rise of Islamic politics is

almost the only new development that has gained considerable attention, albeit one that is generally viewed with misgivings. Other changes, more relevant to our concerns here, but less frequently noted, include the liberalization of the mass media, the emergence of a new set of discourses of ethnicity and, most impressively, the revitalization of Indonesian art and cultures, including those genres that can be categorized as 'popular cultures'.

Significantly, all this took place in the context of several other important developments. First, during this short but vibrant period, the number of women taking leading roles in literature and film production increased remarkably, although this does not necessarily mean a radical transformation of gender roles and politics (see Hatley 1997 for the case of literature; Sen 2005 and Sulistyani 2006 for film). This happened at the same time as an increase in the prominence of sexuality and gender-related themes in recent pop culture (see Clark 2002). Second, there has been a noticeable decentring of Jakarta, the capital city, in the production of these new creative works, in the direction of both the local and global networks. Third, the domestic production and consumption of pop culture have increased in tandem with the markedly greater popularity of works from other Asian countries. Chinese, Indian, and South Korean films and television series have gained phenomenal respect, alongside Hong Kong movies, Taiwanese pop music, and Japanese comics and animation series (see also Chapters 3 and 5 in this book). I will return to these phenomena, paying special attention to contemporary films with some relevance to post-1998 ethnic politics. In order to do so, I will first provide a brief overview of the latter.

Chinese Indonesians under the New Order

It is useful to begin with the question of what being 'Chinese' meant under the New Order (1966–98). Most writings on the subject emphasize the series of discriminations against this minority group. Although most observers have commented on their economic prominence, few have taken seriously the seemingly contradictory phenomena (political and cultural repression versus economic favouritism) as inseparable and mutually dependent. The New Order discrimination against this ethnic minority is best understood as a paradox (see Heryanto 1998 for details).

Ethnicity is largely, if not only, comprised of fiction. This is particularly true for the so-called ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. It is easy and convenient to forget its fictiveness in the flow of conversation, scholarly or otherwise (see Mandal 2003). Among this officially designated group, there are widely diverse social identities. Regardless of this diversity, citizens of this ethnic minority have not achieved, and will be unlikely to achieve, a status comparable to their counterparts in neighbouring countries. Chinese Indonesians do not enjoy the same social and cultural respect or legal protection as their counterparts in Thailand or the Philippines (Crouch 1985), where assimilation attained success to a significant extent, despite their rough edges in the past and a

potential threat of resurgence in the present (Hau 2003; Tejapira 2003). Neither do Chinese Indonesians enjoy such respect or protection as their counterparts in the consociational state of Malaysia (Tan 2001; Heryanto and Mandal 2003). The reason for this is, to quote the words of one analyst, the 'unbudging alienness' of the Indonesian minority group. This, in turn, is an 'ideological product of socio-historical processes specific to Indonesia, particularly in its construction of nationhood' (Aguilar 2001: 505).

The Chinese minority found access to state education and public service difficult. Entry to professions other than in trade and industry sectors was limited or impossible. Culturally, 'Chineseness' was declared foreign, while politically and morally it was undesirable to the officially constructed 'Indonesian Self'. Those labelled as 'of Chinese descent' were regularly subjected to discrimination. Until near the close of the twentieth century, the Chinese script occupied the same category as explosives, pornography, and narcotics in the customs declaration forms that all visitors had to complete when entering the country. Chinese names for persons, organizations, and businesses had to be 'Indonesianized'. Chinese language, mass media, and organizations were eliminated and prohibited.

So extensive was the war against Chineseness, such as in Central Java where I used to live, that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, popular Chinese physical exercises, Mandarin songs in karaoke entertainment centres, and the sale of certain Chinese cakes were prohibited (see also Suryadinata 1985; Indrakusuma 1993; Subianto 1993; TAPOL 1993; McBeth and Hiebert 1996). In 1990, in cities of the Central Java province, no Mandarin song was allowed to be heard during the New Year's Eve celebration (*Kedaulatan Rakyat* 1990). All of this was done under the pretext that the New Order state was committed to assimilating the minority into the Indonesian body politic, by purging it of foreignness (i.e. Chineseness), and by fully assimilating it in *pribumi* (indigenous) culture and society. The 'assimilation' program was designed to fail.

The assimilation program had difficulty achieving its stated aims, firstly, because its coercive style of implementation provoked resentment, mostly in covert ways. In the capital city and among the better-connected members of the Chinese community, few individuals managed to defy the rules and pressures by retaining their Chinese names, or by engaging in activities deemed 'Chinese' (for instance speaking Mandarin or another Chinese dialect and observing some of their traditional rituals). But, secondly, and more importantly, the assimilation program was doomed to fail because success would have undermined the interest of its own sponsors. As I noted elsewhere, to dissolve Chinese identities in an effective program of assimilation means to give up the division of labour by race upon which the status quo depends (Heryanto 1998: 104).

Thus, just as this minority was humiliated and blamed (for bearing the marks of Chineseness), and discriminated against (for being 'un-Indonesian'), the New Order government was also active in manufacturing and nurturing the stigmatized Chineseness. No matter how much a Chinese Indonesian,

especially male, went 'native', the state apparatus would ensure that traces of his past or his already assimilated Chineseness be brought back to the fore for further cycles of discrimination.

In many important legal documents such as birth or marriage certificates, there is a special code number for those citizens with Chinese ethnic background. This practice continues at the time of writing (Dharmasaputra 2007), 10 years after the New Order rule formally collapsed. Those who have dutifully complied with the official pressures to give up their Chinese names and adopted 'Indonesian' sounding alternatives still have to declare their old names when filling in forms. They have to present a certified document indicating their registered name change, thus distinguishing themselves from other citizens and rendering themselves subject to a series of extra requirements, both legal and illegal. Material issues aside, the moral and emotional effects of such systematic discrimination can be profound, as powerfully illustrated in the short story '*Panggil Aku: Pheng Hua*' (Call Me: Pheng Hua) (Wardhana 2002). A Chinese man can marry an Indonesian *pribumi* woman and live like other *pribumis*, but they, their children, and potentially all their descendants will be labelled 'Chinese' by the state. In short, the stigma of Chineseness is hereditary and timeless.

The New Order-style assimilation was a paradox. Discrimination was practised not only *against* most members of the Chinese community in political and cultural affairs, but also *for* selected members of this ethnic group in the business sector. To prevent the possible emergence of a new independent bourgeoisie that might challenge the regime, the New Order political elite purposefully discriminated against many potential entrepreneurs among the *pribumi*. The state bureaucrats preferred to work with three groups: (a) members of the first family; (b) selected Chinese businessmen; and (c) foreign investors. In turn, this overt favouritism, nepotism, and collusion served to heighten existing anti-Chinese sentiments, as well as some measures of sustained xenophobia against the West. Rich Chinese business individuals were projected in public as the 'representatives' of the entire ethnic community. They were seen as those who most benefited materially from the status quo, through immoral and illegal means, at the expense of the majority *pribumi*.

Given the weight of the ethnic issue in critical areas of state administration, social interaction, and public consciousness, its absence in literary fiction and films over many decades is strange to say the least. For the same reasons, the fall of the New Order in 1998 prompts the question of what has happened in and outside Indonesian literature and films since then.

Return of the Dragon?

There is a strong tendency among observers to describe the 1998 resignation of President Suharto and the end of his New Order government as a big surprise, with Sen (2006: 172) being one of the rare exceptions.[7] Likewise, there is

a tendency to overstate the extent to which ethnic politics has altered since then. While the excitement of post-1998 Indonesia reform (*Reformasi*) has quickly dissipated, observers of Chinese Indonesians have been generally impressed by the rapid resurgence and high profile of Chinese politics and culture in the public sphere. However, these changes had actually begun several years before Suharto resigned. And the significance of these developments is more ambiguous than has usually been recognized.

One example is the public celebration of the Chinese New Year, in which the dragon dance is a very visible part. As I have discussed elsewhere (see Heryanto 1998, 1999), contrary to the general view, the public celebration of the New Year and the dragon dance had in fact already re-appeared by the early 1990s, well before 2000 when President Abdurahman Wahid officially lifted the ban, and before the then President Megawati Sukarnoputri declared in 2002 that from 2003 the Chinese New Year would be a national public holiday. In the mid-1990s, such a public celebration flew in the face of the formal restrictions that were still in force. In the early 1990s, when official restrictions on such celebration were reiterated with a new breath of anti-Chinese sentiments, they provoked public protest that had no precedent in the New Order's history.

Most accounts of the Chinese in Indonesia emphasize this as a case of repression (rather than the paradox suggested earlier). Consequently, the general expectations after 1998 have been framed narrowly in terms of liberation, recognition, reinsertion, empowerment, and revival. The highly problematic conception of ethnicity itself, Chineseness in particular, has been left unquestioned. Admittedly, liberation, public recognition, celebration, and reconciliation of some sort have been in place for some time. But this is not the whole story, and these changes do not affect the diverse Chinese Indonesian communities. Indeed the questions of who is or is not 'Chinese'-Indonesian, and of where, when, how, and why remain daunting and largely avoided. If the group's boundary and identity are not clear, it is hard to speak of 'liberation'. Whose liberation exactly is this?

Even those who self-identify as Chinese Indonesians (common among the older generation, and upper-class) cannot simply 'go back' to where they imagined they had once been (presumably in the early 1960s) before the New Order came to power. Things have changed so significantly and irrevocably since the 1960s that the current younger generation of Chinese Indonesians is both more Indonesianized and hybridized, a situation similar to, and connected with, that of their counterparts in other parts of Asia. When the New Order collapsed, mainland China was a different entity from what it was in the 1960s. It can no longer be as it was in the first half of the twentieth century, an important point of reference for members of an ostensibly 'liberated' minority. At the same time, Indonesia has changed in many profound ways too. Although anti-communism outlived the New Order government, the formal political power of the zealously anti-communist and anti-Chinese elite at the dawn of the New Order rule in the mid-1960s has been profoundly eroded. An

increasing number of the new generation of Indonesian *pribumi* elite show off pictures of their visits to Chinese tourist spots, something that would have been unthinkable in the previous two and a half decades.

Ethnic-based political parties and social associations sprang up among the Chinese community after Suharto's resignation in 1998, something that has gained a great deal of attention from scholars and journalists alike (see Suryadinata 2001). None of these newly established parties and associations, however, has any significant political clout. Most have been short-lived, carrying only some symbolic and emotional values and expressing a long-repressed desire for public recognition and an emotional response to the 1998 racial violence. Neither these new parties and associations nor their attentive analysts have critically questioned what all of this contributes to the reconstruction of ethnic politics, and what 'Chineseness' means at this juncture. Their common interest is simply to boost the rights, recognition, and interests of a 'group' whose imagined identity remains nebulous and whose substantive elements remain fictional.

The increase in public use and study of Chinese language and characters has been phenomenal across the country. There are now five daily newspapers in the Chinese script. Some of the nationwide television networks and many private radio stations across the archipelago have regular programs in Mandarin (Samudera 2002). But in the great majority of cases, this practice is economically driven by instrumental rather than ideological or cultural motivations (see Hoon 2004). As noted earlier, Chinese New Year has been made a national public holiday. Its extended and elaborated celebration has been exuberant, attracting sympathizers from beyond the membership of the ethnic minority. But, as with Christmas celebrations in most industrialized societies, the commercial entertainment industry plays as great a role in this festivity – if not a greater one – as the pious believers in the 'tradition', religious or otherwise.

Despite what appears to be a dramatic transformation in the status of the ethnic minority over a fairly short period of time, some of the old problems persist, and new challenges have emerged. There has been no complete reversal of the status of this long-stigmatized ethnic group. Racial prejudice between the so-called Chinese Indonesians and their fellow nationals (especially in the western and central parts of the archipelago) is alive and kicking. In a very illuminating analysis, Indarwati Aminuddin (2002) discusses the racist overtones of many post-1998 journalistic reports in two major print media (the news weekly *Tempo* and its sister daily *Koran Tempo*). The two media companies command a high level of respect in the country for their commitment to professionalism. Even with Aminuddin's minimal criteria for judgment (the popular conception of Chinese ethnicity is taken as given), the results of the study are very discouraging.

My analysis below of two recent and popular films that feature Chinese Indonesians as their protagonists, *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) and *Gie* (2005), confirms the observation of a broader phenomenon. This is not to overlook the fact that, by presenting a Chinese Indonesian protagonist, both films set themselves

apart from many other Indonesian films. As their subjects are politically sensitive, both films could be considered bold and 'risky' from a business perspective. As semi-historical films, both films also deserve a special appreciation for the research and costs that have gone into their production. This is rather rare in Indonesia.

Both films are also unusual for another reason. Most of the people behind their production are not of Chinese descent. In an essay to welcome the staging of a famous production of the Chinese folkloric love-story *Sampek Engtay* by Teater Koma in Indonesia (2004), literary critic Faruk HT expressed both his deep sympathy for the Chinese minority and his regret that no artistic author of this group had yet presented works on the contemporary life of their ethnic fellows to enlighten what he alleged to be a poorly informed public. I suspect Faruk was eager to see the Indonesian counterparts of 'hyphenated' or so-called heritage Asian writers in several Western countries. He rightly suggested that television mostly presented this ethnic minority in caricature and stereotypes, presenting them as non-human, while Chinese Indonesian writers tended to make the self-effacing move of writing like other Indonesians. He accused them of completely neglecting sensitive subject matter, or dealing with it in a distant period or in settings far removed from the general public's sense of reality (Faruk 2004). With due sympathy, I find his appeal to Chinese Indonesian authors problematic. Inadvertently, perhaps, he suggests that one's ethnicity gives one privileged knowledge and understanding of the lives of all members of one's ethnic group. As Pamela Allen (2003: 69) rhetorically asks, I am not convinced that writers should be expected to be preoccupied with their own ethnicity, and write primarily about, and for, their own ethnic communities.

There has been due acknowledgment in public that Chinese Indonesians – like other ethnic groups – are heterogeneous, and that many are no less acculturated to local living traditions and/or global cultures. But such awareness does not take the next step and interrogate the dualism of the *pribumi*/non-*pribumi* divide, and hence the 'artificiality' of ethnicity. Very few have seriously considered the idea that ethnicity is a modern 'fiction', something external to one's mode of being and everyday life. The metaphor of 'Chinese blood' – if sometimes impure – that runs through a Chinese 'body' still dangerously prevails. Even staunch critics of the New Order's racist policy and advocates of universalist civil rights for this ethnic minority tend to subscribe to and, by extension, reproduce the fiction, equating ethnicity with descent and seeing 'Chinese' and 'indigenous' in the final analysis as two distinct entities whose co-existence can be in harmony or conflict.

Ca-bau-kan **(2002)**

Ca-bau-kan is based on the novel of the same title. It tells a story of Tan Peng Liang and his mistress Tinung, a *pribumi*. Tan is a Chinese *peranakan* (acculturated Chinese in East Indies/Indonesia), the son of a rich Chinese

businessman. His mother is the daughter of a Javanese aristocrat. Unlike most inter-racial love stories circulating in New Order Indonesia, *Ca-bau-kan* is rich in ethnographic and historical details (the accuracy of which is not the concern of this analysis). Dialogues in Chinese appear in many parts of the narrative, and alongside those in Dutch, variants of Malay, Japanese, and Arabic. The novel even presents handwritten notes by some of the characters in the story in Chinese and Dutch orthography, as if the story was real and the handwritten notes were authentic. To some extent, the portrayal of the protagonist defies the familiar stereotyping;[8] he is at the same time familiarly human and 'Indonesian'. Tan Peng Liang is presented to contemporary Indonesian audiences neither as an idealized hero nor as a despicable villain. More relevant to our concern is the fact that the novel challenges the official history of the nation during the New Order, which had been purged of the roles of the Chinese ethnic minority and the Left, and the complex relations between Chinese *peranakan* and *pribumi*.

The story was first published as a serial in the daily *Republika*, the first major and markedly Islamic daily newspaper in the nation since the New Order came to power in 1966 (see Chapter 1). It was later published as a novel, entitled *Ca-bau-kan*.[9] In 2002, it was turned into a widescreen film with the same title but without the hyphens (for the sake of simplicity, this slight distinction will be ignored in this chapter), making the story more accessible to a wider audience. A year later, copies of the film were further mass-produced for sale in video compact disc (VCD) format. Film critics had mixed reactions to the film, commonly noting that it did not live up to the expectations of those who had read the novel. But the painstaking efforts of the young, first-time film director Nia Dinata in depicting some colossal and daunting features of the movie are well commended. In October 2002, the film won two awards at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in Seoul. In January 2003, it passed the first selection round for the US Oscar award for foreign films.

Earlier I cited Krishna Sen, who has pioneered the investigation into the absence of Chinese characters in Indonesian films. Sen's view on *Ca-bau-kan* is entirely critical. She argues that the film continues the New Order's racism by portraying the Chinese Indonesians entirely in a negative light, in complete contrast to the *pribumi*. As Sen sees it, in *Ca-bau-kan*:

> The community of Chinese businessmen ... is universally corrupt, ruthless and rich, with little empathy with the Indonesian population and its nationalist aspirations. They sell out to the Japanese to advance their petty individual interests. There is nothing in this construction that departs from the common stereotype of the Chinese community as living in a simultaneously isolated and sexually and economically exploitative relationship with the majority indigenous population. There is not one Chinese character in the film (even including the hero) who is not corrupt, ruthless and rich. The *pribumi* by contrast are

> normalized across the social spectrum: the poor, the prostitute, but also the incorruptible committed journalists, fearless young freedom fighters, the Javanese aristocrats.
>
> In another peculiarly characteristic stereotyping common in New Order discourse, the Chinese protagonist is simultaneously a ruthless capitalist but also in dangerous liaisons with communists.
>
> (Sen 2006: 181)

I see *Ca-bau-kan* as a sincere, albeit awkward and only partly successful attempt to defy the decades-long stereotyping of Chinese Indonesians. That it appears as a restrained or half-hearted deviation from decades of stereotyping is an index of the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of making a total break from the many decades of state-sponsored normalized racism. It is true that the world of *Ca-bau-kan* is not egalitarian and free of racism. Neither do we find an innocent and lovable ethnic Chinese protagonist. But given its historical context, *Ca-bau-kan* is a break from what preceded it in the last decades of Indonesia's film history for the following reasons.

Here for the first time in many decades we see the appearance of a Chinese Indonesian as a male protagonist on a wide screen, and who is narrated in such a way as to appeal to the sympathy of the viewers. Despite all his morally questionable characteristics and behaviour, Tan Peng Liang is presented with consistent sympathy as a near-hero, and viewers are expected to identify with him. To what extent this authorial intent is successful is a different matter. But it is worth keeping in mind, given the level of corruption and normalization of violence in the viewers' real-world environment, that such an expectation is not entirely misplaced.

Inter-racial love stories in many racial-conflict ridden societies tend to present the male protagonist from the same group as the producers and the primary target audience. The same applies to Indonesia.[10] In the 1930s, when ethnic Chinese had a privileged position economically and enjoyed political liberty, the few inter-racial love stories that they produced featured Chinese men and *pribumi* women (see Sen 2006: 174–75). This was reversed when Chinese ethnic groups became political and a cultural pariah under the New Order as illustrated by the 1980 assimilation propaganda film *Putri Giok* (see Sen 2006: 177). *Ca-bau-kan* does not follow this pattern. Its male protagonist does not share a common ethnicity with the novelist, the film director, or the producer.

Of the few virtues that Tan Peng Liang demonstrates, one is indisputably of great significance for the sensibilities of the Indonesian viewers in general, namely the service he gave to the nationalist guerilla fighters who fought for Indonesian independence. More significantly and sympathetically, all he asks in return for his service is not special treatment in business dealings, but recognition as a legitimate part of the independent nation: '[t]he important thing is, when Indonesia gets its independence, and all of you

occupy important positions in the government, never forget me. I want to live peacefully, no worrying, with my family' (Sylado 1999: 360).

This statement can be read in more than one way. One review (Suyono and Chudori 2002) associated it with the intimate relationship between Suharto (an army officer during the 1940s who became the New Order president for six successive terms) and Liem Sioe Liong, his crony *par excellence* who has become one of Asia's richest tycoons since the 1990s. Others see it differently (more below). Anyone with a basic understanding of Indonesia's history before and after Independence and the roles of some Chinese Indonesians in that history would not miss the implied irony in this modest and innocent-sounding plea. Any such request by a member of an important social group who had helped change Indonesia into a modern and independent nation has been completely ignored and betrayed.

Unfortunately, the above 'politically correct' gesture on the part of the author is not further developed throughout the narrative. Far from radically subverting the New Order's racism, in *Ca-bau-kan* ethnicity is presented as something inherently and fatally biological. As if faithfully following the New Order's propaganda, Tan is only half-virtuous, thanks to his being half-*pribumi*. Most other ethnically Chinese characters are despicable, unlike most of the *pribumi* counterparts. I say 'most' because unlike Sen, who sees the dichotomy in entirety, I found minor exceptions in the contrasts. Among the ethnic Chinese characters, there is Njoo Tek Hong, a song and dance trainer (Sylado 1999: 14, 46–52), who appears very helpful to the disadvantaged like Tinung, despite his unpleasant manners. Among the *pribumi*, there are several 'bad' women characters at the beginning of the story who attack Tinung out of jealousy (Sylado 1999: 8–11), as well as the corrupt prison head who helps Tan Peng Liang escape easily (Sylado 1999: 216–18).

At one point, and via the voice of another *pribumi* character, Max Awuy, we can see another view of Tan Peng Liang's characterization that eludes any black-and-white caricature:

> In silence, Max Awuy tried to comprehend Tan Peng Liang's true identity from his own perspective, and only later on would he understand that it was complex and impossible. . . . he was increasingly aware that the world where he stood was not just black-and-white. There were a lot more colours there. Worse still, these colours changed names, following the external forces that made these changes legitimate.
>
> (Sylado 1999:361)

We do not know for sure if this view represents that of the author. The extent to which he is successful in projecting the persona of the protagonist is a separate issue.

Likewise, I find Tan Peng Liang's association with the arms trader and the communist insurgency during the Japanese occupation to be more

ambiguous than Sen suggests (Sen 2006: 181). Although such an association may invoke negative reaction from some sections of the Indonesian population, a closer look at the matter reveals a possible and significantly different implication. When asked if he has any problems dealing with communists, Tan's reply is clear and certain: 'I am a trader … [whether I have to deal with] communists or capitalists is irrelevant. Where there is some profit to be gained, I will make a deal' (Sylado 1999: 271).

Incidentally, this association with communism also signified anti-colonialism from the very beginning. Later on it proved to be instrumental to Indonesian independence. This is well noted in a ceremonial speech by one of the leading pro-independence fighters, who has become a high official in the new government, Soetardjo Rahardjo, who is also Tan's *pribumi* cousin:

> Mr. Tan Peng Liang is a national asset. This man made a significant contribution to the armed forces during the struggle against colonialism. For that, before I say anything else, and on behalf of the nationalists, let me congratulate him and thank him.
>
> (Sylado 1999: 381)

This is something that Suharto never hinted at in any of his public statements about any of his Chinese Indonesian cronies. In contrast to Sen's arguments, these episodes provide a legitimate space not only to Tan Peng Liang, an ethnic Chinese, but also to the communists in the national history of the struggle for independence.

In a way, this helps us see how the narrative engages with questions of nationhood and the legitimate space for ethnic Chinese. As Sen eloquently states, summarizing the situation of post-1998 Chinese Indonesians, Tan Peng Liang has been 'recuperated into Indonesian citizenship' by association to his mother and mistress, but he remains a permanently second-class, politically muted, citizen (Sen 2006: 182). In the vote of thanks cited above, Soetardjo Rahardjo acts as someone representing the nation's true heirs (*pribumi*) who acknowledges the service of Tan Peng Liang, a helpful outsider. The latter can be an endearing 'asset' to the nation, but never a true and equal member of a collective and incomplete project of nation-building. This leads us to another critical point in our discussion, namely the conception of ethnicity: whether *Ca-bau-kan* affirms or subverts the dominant concept of ethnicity as something biological in the blood rather than a historically social construct.

The answer to this question has already been implied in the preceding paragraphs. A stronger articulation of an essentialist and biological understanding of ethnicity is found at the beginning of the story. The following is the voice of Tan Giok Lan or Mrs. G.P.A. Dijkhoff (daughter of Tinung and Tan Peng Liang) in the 1990s, framing the whole narrative as a story of an adult in exile returning to her homeland in search of the identities of her parents:

> Like it or not, I am confronted by this question. It is not possible for me to erase my lineal descent. The fact is, my blood is partly Chinese and partly Indonesian. At the same time, I am a wife of a genuine Dutchman whose father occupied the Indonesian people.
>
> (Sylado 1999: 2).

Note the curious contrast that Mrs. G.P.A. Dijkhoff makes of her father's and mother's identities: 'Chinese' versus 'Indonesian', instead of 'Chinese' versus one or more *pribumi* ethnicities.[11] The latter is casually equated with the nation, while the former is a hyphenated compatriot at best, and an undesired alien at worst. One popular reference to Chinese Indonesians is 'WNI *keturunan*' (literally 'citizen of Indonesia, of descent'). While the popular shorthand 'WNI' does not necessarily imply that only the Chinese minority are 'citizens' of Indonesia, critical observers have been quick to note that, in fact, this commonplace label may reveal a subconscious popular conception of their status as 'sons and daughters of the soil' or *pribumi*, for whom no formal evidence of citizenship is necessary (Aguilar 2001: 517, 519). Unlike the Chinese minority, the *pribumis* are believed to be naturally and automatically 'Indonesian' by birth or descent. Indonesians born and raised overseas until adulthood will all of a sudden become 'sons or daughters of the soil' when setting foot for the first time in Indonesia if their parents or any of their ancestors were *pribumi*.

This implies that 'Indonesia' is a kind of inherited property exclusively owned by *pribumi*. Generations of Chinese Indonesians born and raised in Indonesia should be grateful for being given the opportunity to be 'Indonesianized' if the *pribumi*, as true heirs of Indonesia, decide to grant them such a favour. But this will require a series of rituals and procedure, and a considerable cost. Because this is such an unnatural undertaking it follows that, even with the best possible efforts, the outcome can never be authentic and full 'Indonesianness'.

Of equal importance is the nationalist sentiment in Giok Lan's statement, to which we must return in a moment. While it is easy to read *Ca-bau-kan* largely as a reproduction of the essentialist notion of ethnicity, the story contains contradictory elements, making it ambiguous if not awkward in this respect. In *Ca-bau-kan* there are two unrelated characters who have the same name (Tan Peng Liang), with misidentification playing a major part in the twists of the storyline. When introducing the second Tan Peng Liang, the narrator describes him as a resident of Jembatan Lima, owning a banana plantation in Sewan, Tangerang, where 'Chinese people have become *pribumi* ever since their ancestors found this place in escape from the massacre of the Chinese by the Dutch in Jakarta in 1740' (Sylado 1999: 17).

The status of *pribumi* and, by extension, ethnicity, is not understood as something fixed that comes with birth, but rather cultural upbringing and dispositions that can be acquired and adopted by outsiders. Chinese in Tangerang can be 'naturalized' not so much as 'Indonesians' by the immigration

department of the state, but as '*pribumi*' through generations of acculturation. Read in the 2000s, this is akin to the notion of 'assimilation' as prescribed by the New Order government. Unfortunately, this interesting non-essentialist and non-biologist perspective has neither resonance nor further development in the rest of the story. It is a tiny fleeting element that sparkles for a moment in the story then disappears with no trace, almost like something that came by accident or in error.

Nationalist sentiment permeates the 400-odd page novel and the two-hour long film. This is to be expected, as the story is set for the most part during the struggle for independence and the early years of the free nation. Less expected is a similar sentiment in Giok Lan's thinking as she speaks to herself and to the Indonesian audience in 1990s, when nationalist ideology was seriously eroded across the globe. For children of the liberal West, contemporary Indonesians may sound more than a little nationalistic, especially when discussing the West or the Chinese minority. In this context, even the conservative insertion of the Chinese protagonist without serious vices (Tan Peng Liang is certainly more ambiguous than most others that appeared in Indonesian literary or cinematic narratives in the past few decades) appears bold and unusual – let alone the small suggestion cited earlier that some members of this ethnic group could possibly be assimilated as they 'escaped from the massacre of the Chinese by the Dutch in Jakarta in 1740' (Sylado 1999: 17).[12]

Gie **(2005)**

Nationalism also strongly sets the tone of the second film to be discussed, *Gie* (2005), whose fame originates mainly from two important sources. First, it was produced by and starred the nation's most celebrated figures of the day (director Riri Riza; producer Mira Lesmana; and Nicholas Saputra as the main actor). Second, it is based on the diary of Soe Hok Gie, a legendary student activist of the 1960s, of Chinese ethnic background, who died at the age of 27 while mountain climbing. Memories of Soe have been kept alive partly by the posthumous publication of his diary (*Catatan Harian Seorang Demonstran*, 1983), and partly by his elder brother's (Arief Budiman) engagement with student and NGO activism after Soe's death.

Like *Ca-bau-kan*, *Gie* deserves to be commended for its defiance of the nation's mainstream and remarkably conservative film production. Compared to *Ca-bau-kan*, *Gie* was definitely more difficult to produce, not only because it is based on a true story of a well-respected public figure, but also because many people who are part of the story were still alive and active when the film was released. Unfortunately, like *Ca-bau-kan* the film (and unlike *Ca-bau-kan* the novel), as a whole *Gie* is rather disappointing as a narrative and as an artistic work.

In contrast to the protagonist Tan Peng Liang in *Ca-bau-kan*, whose moral quality is either totally corrupt as Sen (2006) argues or ambiguously so as I

noted above, the protagonist Soe Hok Gie in *Gie* is presented as a morally 'pure', intellectually superior, and politically ideal hero. Against the backdrop of *Ca-bau-kan* as discussed above, Soe Hok Gie is portrayed as being a model citizen. Such attributes were not invented by the film but were already widely circulated during the New Order. The fact that Soe is of Chinese ethnicity makes it doubly intriguing. He is paradoxically both '*not Indonesian enough*' and problematically '*too Indonesian*'. He is 'exceptionally Indonesian', excessively more so than other fellow nationals in the story. In contrast to his racist environment (Riza 2005: 65, 107), Soe neither has a racist inclination nor is bothered by being a target for repeated racist hostility. Ironically, here is one major source of the problems with the film.[13]

First of all, *Gie* appears to have lost its momentum to appeal to Indonesian youth as the film-makers intended to do (indeed publicly stating this intention). As indicated earlier, by the time the film was made, many Indonesians had been demoralized, their activism marginalized, and the public disillusioned by the political reform movement of 1998. By producing *Gie*, and promoting the film the way they did, the film-makers appeared to try to revive a new optimism for Indonesian political reform via a nostalgia for the romanticized activism in the 1960s. But this was done when the rest of the nation was either nostalgic for a return to the New Order rule or simply profoundly apathetic towards politics. It is hard to expect Indonesians in the first decade of the twenty-first century to be more attracted to the profile of Soe than to his 'ordinary' schoolmates. In contrast to the familiarly easy-going and youthful characters of the latter, the protagonist appears strikingly as an idiosyncratic loner, boringly studious, embarrassingly awkward in romantic relations, zealously nationalistic, and morally a purist.[14]

During the height of New Order repressions, it was easy to romanticize student activism and fantasize an uncompromising figure like Soe. But in 2005 the following scenes appeared anachronistically absurd, if not laughable. In one scene, when reaching the top of a mountain, Gie exclaims: 'This is beloved Indonesia ... [Gie observes the scenery lovingly] You can't really say this with pride unless you see this for yourself and feel it ... That's why we climb mountains' (Riza 2005: 26). On another occasion, when Gie and his friends arrive at the summit of Mount Salak, they sing a patriotic song *Negeri* "*Bagimu* (To you, the motherland) (Riza 2005: 91)."

Second, being portrayed as so 'ideally Indonesian', Soe Hok Gie appears very unfamiliar to most Indonesians. He is someone too far removed from what we find in everyday life in Indonesia. He is not someone ordinary Indonesians can easily meet, identify with or emulate. During the New Order, public discussion on Chinese Indonesians often referred to figures like Soe Hok Gie, not because he was well known (and thus a convenient referent), but because of his mythologized virtues. He is cited as an example of a 'good' Indonesian citizen, and a model for ordinary Chinese Indonesians to emulate. The problem is that he may not be a model that ordinary Indonesians of any ethnicity would be interested in or able to identify with.

Apart from the problem of an overdose of nationalism, *Gie* also suffers from two other major problems from a political perspective. First, with specific reference to Chinese ethnicity, the film does not depart significantly from New Order-speak and stereotyping, despite the exceptional sympathy for the Chinese Indonesian protagonist. Second, the film is also politically disappointing in its overall reference to the politically sensitive period of the mid-1960s. By and large it reaffirms the New Order's propaganda about its legitimacy at a time when such propaganda had been seriously discredited in public outside the cinema. Let me say more about each of these.

Being true to real-life and to the history depicted, *Gie* presents characters who are of Indonesian nationals from many different ethnic backgrounds. However, for curious reasons, in the published film-script the director and screenplay writer Riri Riza singles out those of Chinese ethnicity with reference to their ethnicity. Other characters are individuals, but not those labelled as ethnically Chinese. The following examples from the script are typical:

> One man of Chinese descent greets him, he is TAN KOEN.
>
> Two men of Chinese descent look at each other and smile a little.
>
> A man, 50 years old, of Chinese descent, SURYA WINATA, sits at a dining table, reading a newspaper.
>
> AT A NOODLE FOODSTALL. Two old men of Chinese descent read a newspaper intensely.
>
> (Riza 2005:30, 47, 95, 144)

On screen, these people do not look distinctively 'Chinese', as they might have been intended to do by those who made the film. The whole issue of post-1998 cinematic representations of Chinese Indonesians (especially the attempts of those producing *Ca-bau-kan* and *Gie* to depart from stereotyping the ethnic minority in appearance) requires a special discussion that lies beyond the scope of this chapter.[15] Suffice it to note here that neither of the main protagonists in the two films discussed has the appearance of what Indonesians would commonly recognize as 'typically' Chinese Indonesians. More remarkably, Soe Hok Gie appears in *Gie* with a Eurasian face – the standard image of a male hero in Indonesian films, and in films from other former colonies of Europe. Nicholas Saputra, who played the role of Soe Hok Gie, has a German father.

For decades in the middle of the twentieth century, Indonesians debated whether Chinese Indonesians should purge themselves of their Chineseness in becoming Indonesians or maintain their specific cultural ethnic heritage on a par with other ethnic groups. The first has come to be known as the 'assimilation' position, propagated by the rightist sectors of the population, including the military. The second, called the 'integration' option, was supported by the more Left-leaning groups.[16] The ascendancy of the militarist regime of the New Order in 1966 put an end to the debate, making 'assimilation'

the only legitimate mode of being Chinese Indonesian. But as noted earlier, this state-sanctioned program of assimilation is one that was designed to fail, otherwise it would have undermined the interests of its own sponsors. Presented retrospectively in the 2000s, when any association with New Order propaganda became necessarily suspect, the hero Soe Hok Gie appears in the film as a supporter of the military's position (assimilationist) (Riza 2005: 44). Actually, alliance with the military is not only the position of the protagonist Gie, but also the overall perspective of the film, especially with reference to the murky and bloody history of 1965–66.[17]

Gie was released at a time when the Indonesian public was just beginning to demythologize the official history of 1965, rejecting the legitimacy of the militarist government of the New Order, rehabilitating citizens long stigmatized for being sympathetic to communism and Sukarno, and boldly demanding justice for the military abuse of power, even if often to no avail. Previous myths about Soe Hok Gie and the commercial promotion of *Gie* raised public expectations that this was a film about an uncompromising figure in political activism fighting against state repression. What we get in the film is almost the opposite. Almost identically with the spokespeople of the New Order regime, Gie is shown to be strongly anti-Sukarno and anti-communist, and pro-military. To one of his best friends, Herman, Gie confides: 'To put it simply, I just want to have a change, so that life can be better … for that to happen, Sukarno must fall' (Riza 2005:67). Gie joins the army-backed anti-communist rally and demands the banning of the then legal Communist Party (Riza 2005: 79, 92, 114).

Not only does Gie attempt to woo the sympathy of the film's audience to be in alliance with the military. To a significant extent, his overall activities in the narrative in fact represent a particular style of student life that the New Order prescribed for Indonesian youths and students: to study hard, be nationalistic, stay clear of 'dirty politics', and be a moral voice of the people. Except for his inclination to irritate government officials with moral criticism, Gie is a hero of the apolitical who opines: 'For me, politics is the dirtiest thing, the filthy mud … But if we cannot choose otherwise, we must take part' (Riza 2005: 53). The only form of overtly political activity that the protagonist is shown to take part in is the street rallies that were instrumental to the ascendance of the military to state power. He and his close friends' main interests are elsewhere, however: 'We'll organize activities for the student union with programs that we like … mountain hikes, music, film screenings, … But occasionally we will criticize the government, obviously' (Riza 2005: 60–61).

In contrast to the apolitical Gie, the film also features Gie's friend from childhood, Tan Tjin Han, who joins the Indonesian Communist Party. We recall Sen's apprehensiveness earlier with a scene in *Ca-bau-kan* where Tan Peng Liang makes a deal in illegal armaments with the anti-colonial communist guerrillas. Sen fears that this may have given unwarranted support to the New Order's propaganda about the complicity of the People's

Republic of China and Chinese Indonesians in general in the alleged 1965 coup attempt by the Indonesian communists. Unlike Tan Peng Liang, who appears to be both a lot more business-minded and intelligent when dealing with the communists, Tan Tjin Han officially joins the Communist Party with ideological conviction instead of making business deals with communists as an outsider. In other words, if Sen's apprehensiveness is grounded, the film *Gie* makes a lot more damaging statements than anything *Ca-bau-kan* may have done in this respect.[18]

Tan Peng Liang, the semi-hero of *Ca-bau-kan*, survives the nationalist struggle for independence, and his service is subsequently recognized formally by representatives of the fledgling government. In contrast, Tan Tjin Han features in *Gie* as a misguided person who must inevitably be brutally punished by the military, which Gie has supported for much of the narrative. Typical of many works of fiction published during the New Order, in *Gie* there is a scene where a wise person (Gie) advises a naïve young communist against being associated with politics and especially the politics of those in opposition to the military.[19] The scene anticipates and almost justifies the overkill that would be inflicted upon such a fool for not budging (Riza 2005: 31).

Towards the end of the story, Gie appears disillusioned with the new militarist regime and the student political movements. But nowhere in the story do we see any suggestion of the degree of the military's complicity in the massacres of nearly 1,000,000 citizens in 1965–66. Neither is there any suggestion that the event is deeply embedded in the global Cold War, with the Western bloc working closely with the military to eliminate what was then the world's largest communist party outside the USSR and the PRC. This international dimension is mentioned in the preface to the film but not in the series of events that unfold in the film. It appears to escape the attention of the protagonist Gie, despite his supposed intellectual superiority. Narrated from the perspective of a loner, and exonerating the culprits of the nation's most serious crime, the 1965–66 tragedy that befalls Tan Tjin Han (and millions of other Indonesians from various ethnic backgrounds) is portrayed and commented on from a distance as largely an unhappy fate for the individuals.

Conclusions

Two brief conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, like *Ca-bau-kan*, *Gie* is in part a conscious attempt to deviate from and challenge the dominant conception of stereotyped ethnicities in Indonesia, and particularly the Chinese minority. But, at the same time, both films demonstrate how difficult it is for them to do what the film-makers may have intended. In both films, and to various degrees, ethnic stereotyping remains strong. The protagonists in the films, especially in *Gie*, are shown to be atypical Chinese Indonesians, but act in ways or for reasons that are not necessarily

progressive or subversive to the dominant essentialist conception of ethnicity. In the case of *Ca-bau-kan*, the exceptional qualities of Tan Peng Liang are attributed to his *pribumi* mother and *pribumi* mistress. In *Gie*, the protagonist is doubly atypical: an 'atypical' Chinese ethnic, and 'atypically' Indonesian, making it difficult for him to be a model of identification for contemporary Indonesian youths.

Second, with regard to Indonesian nationhood and the status of the Chinese ethnic community, *Gie* is much more progressive than *Ca-bau-kan*. Unlike the latter, *Gie* exposes the more accommodating aspects of the project of nation-building, indiscriminate in regard to the citizen's ethnic background. In contrast to his own political stand on Chinese Indonesian issues (assimilation) and the New Order's more vigorous policies, Soe retains his Chinese name all his life, and participates passionately in the nation-building project with other citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. What *Gie* does not tell its viewers is that such an act was only possible for a few individuals in very small selected areas such as the capital city, Jakarta. Most Chinese Indonesians in the 1960s – even in Jakarta, but more especially outside the capital city – had no choice but to succumb to the intimidating pressures of the New Order government by giving up their personal names and adopting more 'Indonesian-sounding' names, epitomized by none other than Soe's older brother Arief Budiman.

There has been due acknowledgment in public that Chinese Indonesians – like other ethnic groups – are heterogeneous, and that many are no less acculturated into the local living traditions and/or global cultures. But as the two films analysed above illustrate, such awareness does not usually take the next step and interrogate the dualism of the *pribumi*/non-*pribumi* divide and, hence, the 'artificiality' of ethnicity. In tandem with the rapid popularity of oriental-looking characters in imported television series in the early 2000s (in which connection the success of the Taiwanese-made *Meteor Garden* in 2002 remains unrivalled) (see Chapter 5), we see interesting developments in the more low-key films about teenagers and targeting teenagers. Compared with the protagonists in *Ca-bau-kan* and *Gie*, the presence of Chinese ethnic characters in these less respected films is politically much less problematic. Examples include the appearance of markedly Chinese Indonesians (*30 Hari Mencari Cinta*, 2004) or ethnically Chinese characters of another nationality (*Brownies*, 2005). These characters escape the usual stereotyping and they appear to be much more 'ordinary' Indonesians than the protagonists of *Ca-bau-kan* and *Gie*. This is not to suggest that these latter films are superior cinematically. As should be clear from the foregoing, these films are considered in this chapter with very specific purposes in mind.[20]

Just as I completed this study, I had access to the much more acclaimed film *Berbagi Suami* (2006), and heard the report of the release of *Photographs* (2007). As in several light-hearted teenage films mentioned above, Chinese Indonesian characters appear in the award-winning *Berbagi Suami*

as ethnically unproblematic. The same appears to be the case with *Photographs*. Unfortunately the release of these two recent films was too late for them to be included in this current analysis.

Very few Indonesians seriously consider the idea that ethnicity is a modern 'fiction', something that is socially constructed in specific and historically bound situations, being subject to deconstruction and reconstruction. The metaphor of 'Chinese blood' – if sometimes impure – that runs through a Chinese 'body' still dangerously prevails. Even staunch critics of the New Order's racist policy, and advocates of universalist civil rights for this ethnic minority tend to subscribe to, and by extension reproduce, the fiction, equating ethnicity with descent, seeing 'Chinese' and 'indigenous' in the final analysis as two distinct entities, whose co-existence can be in harmony or conflict.

Because Chinese Indonesians have been widely perceived by both themselves and others mainly as a social group that the New Order repressed and humiliated, rather than '*(re)-invented*', or '*(re)constructed*', the main agenda of this group has been conceived of in terms of a revival or reclamation of what was 'lost'. They have demanded truth and justice. They are seeking a legitimate space and recognition in the new polity, rather than radically questioning or 'deconstructing' the whole idea of ethnicity, Chineseness, indigenousness, and official conceptions of nationhood.

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Notes

1 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of the text from its original Indonesian in the citations are my own.
2 The only exception that I could find at the time (where a Chinese Indonesian received a significant mention or the ethnic tension is part of the main story) was the novel *Orang Buangan* (the Outcast) by Harijadi S. Hartowardojo (1971). I missed another exception in the work of Bagin (1981), and did not realize this until the novel was serialized on television in 2002 and reviewed in the press (Pareanom and Setiyardi 2002).
3 These categories are mine (see Heryanto 1988), but see also Sen and Hill (2000: 23–24) for their extended application in analysis of contemporary Indonesian media.

4 For further discussion on this issue see Anderson (1999).
5 The parliamentary elections of April 2004 – widely celebrated as the most democratically administered in the country – rendered Golkar (the New Order's political party) the first winner. Golkar's convention in the same month elected retired General Wiranto (the last surviving Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces under Suharto, whose record of human rights abuse provoked protests domestically and internationally) as the party's candidate for the presidential elections in July 2004. His main challenger in the presidential race was another former general of Suharto's Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (president of Indonesia, from 2004–9).
6 In one such survey some 60.3 per cent of 2,160 respondents (from 372 villages and cities in 32 provinces) preferred Suharto's New Order political system to that in place in 2003. In another, 53 per cent of eligible voters in the 2004 elections 'preferred a strong leader like former president Suharto, even if this meant that rights and freedoms would be reduced' (see Kurniawan 2003).
7 See my brief review in Heryanto (2006: 216, n.5)
8 The deviation is only partial, because Tan still resembles the stereotype of Chinese Indonesians in both his opportunism and his profession (business).
9 References to citations in this chapter are from the novel.
10 Similar trends can be seen in Indonesian literature and in films from other countries such as India.
11 Tinung, the mother, is later identified ethnically as part-Betawi and part-Balinese (Sylado 1999:3).
12 Neither in the novel nor in the film did *Ca-bau-kan* give the historical context of the 1740 massacre. The same silence characterizes many citations of the incident in public discussion. Historian Merle Ricklefs has suggested that the impetus of the violence was the anti-Dutch and 'rebellious' acts of Chinese migrants in and around Batavia (Ricklefs 1993: 90–91). Had these been acts of the so-called *pribumi*, they would probably be recorded in the national history as a heroic struggle for the nation's independence.
13 References to *Gie* are made to its published screenplay under the same title.
14 Compare this with the conscious attempt by Pramoedya Ananta Toer when writing his celebrated tetralogy from the penal island of Buru. During the early years of his exile (1965–79), Toer had access to only a few government-approved teen magazines. He reportedly examined the language and world-view in those magazines and was determined to write his novels to appeal to young people. To what extent this attempt succeeds is not my concern here. But it is worth noting that, in contrast to the protagonist in *Gie*, the protagonist Minke in Toer's novel is a lot more adventurous politically, romantically, sexually, and intellectually. Minke works with and makes enemies of people of very different race and social classes, and marries more than one woman from more than one race.
15 I thank Nancy Florida and Webb Keane for their inspiring comments on this in response to my public presentation of a shorter version of this paper at Michigan University (April 2007).
16 For a recent review of the debate, see Purdey (2003).
17 Gie shifts his political stance towards the end of the story by being increasingly critical of the military government. By extension, we can assume that this also represents the position of those who made the film. But this development comes so late and so little into the story that it barely carries any weight in the context of the whole narrative.
18 This was, in fact, the case, although the Indonesian Communist Party did practically nothing to help mitigate anti-Chinese discrimination in the nation and even within the party itself.

19 Dave McRae (2002: 47) discusses a similar theme in his analysis of the dominant discourse in the New Order in reference to separatist movements. Only the misguided, according to such discourse, could have wanted to be separated from the unitary state of Indonesia.

20 For one of the most critical reviews of Indonesia's teen films during this period from a well-respected writer who adored *Gie* even before it was completed, see Chudori (2004). *Gie* won three awards in the 2005 Indonesian Film Festival, and several more awards from overseas.

5 Consuming Taiwanese boys culture

Watching *Meteor Garden* with urban *Kampung* women in Indonesia

Rachmah Ida

East Asian film and television productions in Mandarin have been shown on Indonesian television since the early 1990s. This is despite the well-documented history of tension between the nation's Chinese ethnic minority and the so-called indigenous population in the central and western parts of the country, especially in the island of Java (see Chapter 4). At the time of writing, almost all national private television channels continue to run the so-called Asia Mandarin and Asia non-Mandarin[1] TV serials, series, and single movies in their every day programming pattern. After the initial success of Hong Kong's TV productions, the Indonesian private television stations searched for other sources of East Asian TV productions, such as Korea, Japan, and Taiwan in the last decade of the twentieth century.

In the early 2000s, Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese TV youth dramas such as *Meteor Garden*, *Winter Sonata*, and *Tokyo Love Story* had a significant number of fans in the country. This is not to say that it is a new trend in Indonesia. What is significant in the more recent trend is the greater level and scope of acceptance in local television markets of the foreign and non-Western media products and pop cultures. Indeed, the present popularity of Asian productions in the Indonesian market can be seen as a triumph of Asian cultural productions in gaining positions once dominated by their American counterparts. However, the nature of the recent popularity of Asian television dramas in Indonesia and they way they are consumed by the domestic viewers in this context remains under-studied.

This chapter analyses the selected views among female urban *kampung* television viewers, and their responses to the portrayals of urban Taiwanese males and the latter's cultural values in a popular imported TV drama, *Meteor Garden*. I will demonstrate how the television-watching experience of the local viewers, particularly when watching these 'foreign' Asian cultural productions, might be indicative of their social class, as well as their social positions in terms of age, gender, and particular *kampung* class-cultural setting (to be elaborated below). I will focus on the form of *kampung* women's emotional engagements with the main characters as they appear in *Meteor Garden*.

I aim to address the question of how the selected viewers of *Meteor Garden* connect the characters and system of values in the television drama to their own cultural beliefs. Additionally, I will ask how their class, gender, and age have an impact upon their responses. Utilizing an ethnographic audience approach, this chapter interrogates how these domestic/local viewers give meaning to such foreign texts in the global flow of culture facilitated by television in contemporary Indonesia. More specifically, given Indonesia's long history of ethnic tension between 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' with oriental looking nationals, this chapter attempts to examine whether pleasure in consuming (foreign) Taiwanese young male looks, cultures, and values has been responsible for shaping the spectator's imagination about the nation's 'other' cultures.

As indicated above, this study focuses on a television audience made up of *kampung* women. They do not necessarily represent the wider television audience in the nation. A *kampung* community is culturally distinctive, and is characteristically influenced by a fairly high level of modernity, mixed with strong traditional values such as religion, as well as by idiosyncratic patterns of social relations in uses of language and mass media, and styles of social interaction. I will argue that all of these elements have impacted on the way the *kampung* viewers give meaning to the 'foreign but-fellow-Asian' cultural production shown on the national television.

Domesticating the Foreign

Lee (1998) points out that there have been three major premises of the media-cultural imperialism thesis about the 'receiving country's autonomy' in the matter of imported television programmes, which he considers crucial to the argument of media-cultural imperialism itself:

> First, it assumes that the government of the receiving country can do little to prevent television programmes from coming in. Second, it assumes that the television industry of the receiving country has little choice but filling up the air with foreign programmes. Third, it assumes that the audience will adopt the values and behaviours exhibited in foreign programmes without much awareness and free choice.
>
> (Lee 1998: 276)

For Lee, these three premises are critical: first, if the receiving country has an autonomy to regulate the broadcasting of imported foreign programmes then those foreign television products are not 'forced upon' the consumers by the imperialist state as assumed in the first premise of media-cultural imperialism. Second, if the television industry of the receiving country is autonomous in deciding whether or not to import foreign programmes from more than one country (imperialist state), but from various foreign programme sources, the idea of 'forced entry and the fear of a global culture of

sameness' (Lee 1998: 277) does not occur. Last, Lee pointed out that audiences in the receiving country do not adopt and respond to the foreign programme contents in a single way. In other words, it is mistaken to assume 'that the audience will learn and adopt the behaviours of imported television in a wholesale manner'.

Without this learning and adopting process, there is no way to form a 'global culture' through sameness (Lee 1998: 277). In fact, the reception of foreign programmes does not go in one direction, rather that depends on the receiving country's policy, the characteristics of the local television industry, and the autonomy of the audience. Taking the cue from Lee's thesis, I will investigate the last factor, namely the autonomy of an audience to give meaning to foreign (Taiwanese) cultural production in this context as a central factor in this audience reception study.

This chapter begins with an overview of the Indonesian television industry, in particular the policy on foreign programmes in television during the era of the private television industry since the early 1990s. This section re-examines the New Order governments' fear of the perceived influence of foreign cultural production on Indonesian media. I will also look at how private television stations have dealt with the media regulations produced by the government both during the New Order era and the era of new Broadcasting Bill number 32/2002. I will then discuss the popularity of one Taiwanese television drama, *Meteor Garden* in 2002, as an example of one successful Asian Mandarin television production in attracting domestic television viewers. The final three sections examine the engagement of the female *kampung* viewers with this drama and their reception practice.

Asian Mandarin on Indonesian Television: an Overview

In this section, I discuss the increase in foreign and non-Western imported products as new resources and patterns of national television programming in the 2000s. I will show how the bourgeoning television industry responds to public demand for models of cultural integration and modernity in the global flow of television. It also looks at the persistence of government regulation toward foreign cultural products in the Indonesian media and how private television stations have occasionally implemented, evaded, or manipulated such regulations for their own commercial interest.

Indonesian television first emerged in the 1960s when political discourse was dominated by issues of nationalism. Consequently, the issues of national development were at the core of national broadcasting policy. Despite the rapid development of technology and economic liberalization in the 1990s, the enduring effects of national political structure in media culture have remained powerful in Indonesia. Television and national development appear to be inseparable in the history of the television industry in Indonesia. Indonesian television, particularly TVRI, the state-owned station, has worked to promote national identity in the interests of national

development, integrity, and unity. Consequently, the requirement to broadcast 80 per cent of local cultures in TVRI's programming schedule has long been imposed.

Apart from these so-called nation-building tasks, the blending features between the local and the foreign components in patterns of national programming are always critical and problematic. On the one hand, in this ethnically diverse nation, the demand to present local cultural values and identity puts strong pressures on national programming schedules. On the other hand, imported programmes are not merely screened to project a look of the modern, but are used by the television stations as a vehicle to attract advertisers and viewers. In terms of their rating, imported programmes both from the US and the new trend from East Asia, still dominate in their competition with local programmes, particularly the local TV dramas (*sinetron*) and celebrity gossip shows. In the top twenty chart of television ratings, the first six programmes are most often occupied by *sinetron*.

The regulations on the percentage of imported programmes that can be shown on Indonesian television are ambiguous. The state-funded channel, TVRI, has long been designed to represent Indonesia's cultural identity by showing Indonesian-made productions in 80 per cent of its airtime. However, when the private television channels were introduced in 1989, there were no strict regulations on the limits of foreign programmes for these private institutions. 'Although the ministerial Decree stated in general terms that Indonesian television must "prioritize" domestic productions, private television was introduced with no specific requirement on domestic content' (Sen and Hill 2000: 120). Sen and Hill also argue that the Indonesian government's regulation on the operation and programming of national television was modelled on the regulations for the film industry, which were required to support the 1945 Constitution (*Undang-Undang Dasar* or UUD 1945), support the state ideology *Pancasila*, and avoid issues that might give rise to ethnic, religious, and racial conflicts between groups (*Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar-golongan*, commonly known by its acronym, SARA).

Under the Indonesian Minister of Information Decree No. 111/1990, all national television institutions were reconceptualized with a new mission to 'support national development plans in accordance with government policy, both domestic and foreign'; they must 'be arranged with full regard to good manners and in *Indonesian language that is true and correct* (*baik dan benar*)'; and programming must avoid 'all possibility of becoming a channel for the spread of foreign ideology or culture which could weaken the national character and national defence'(Sen and Hill 2000: 119). Nonetheless, imported TV programmes on private channels in Indonesia have flourished and have been used by these private TV companies to generate revenue without concern for the impact those foreign materials might have upon the state broadcasting policy and project of nation-building.

The government's regulation in place required that private television networks include local programmes for between 60 to 70 per cent of their total

broadcast contents. However, in 1990 and 1991 no less than 90 per cent of what RCTI and SCTV, two private stations in Indonesia, broadcast were imported programmes, as the cost of imported programmes was reportedly much lower than the cost to purchase local programmes or produce them in-house such as talk shows and *sinetrons* (*Tempo* 1991). Ironically, the 30 to 40 per cent of foreign content became the new trend after the national economic crisis in 1997 and 1998, when private stations were forced to change their own programme strategies. The reasons had nothing to do with nationalist sentiment, but with economic constraints. According to these private channels, as the Indonesian currency exchange dramatically slumped in 1997, the number of foreign programmes broadcast that they could afford suddenly dropped (personal interview with PR officers from RCTI, SCTV, and Indosiar in January 2003). If there was any foreign programme broadcast on their channel at that time, it was most likely a rerun of old stock.

A similar trend occurred with local programmes. Since 1998, private television stations have turned to look for more local productions, particularly locally made television drama (*sinetron*) and to recycle old Indonesian films rather than foreign programmes. For instance, RCTI changed its policy on programme composition after 1997. As indicated above, before 1997, up to 90 per cent of what the channel broadcast was foreign material. In contrast, in 1998, the ratio of RCTI broadcast was 60 per cent local and 40 per cent foreign content. In 1999, local content was about 67 per cent and imported programmes 33 per cent. Over time, the composition of local–foreign content of RCTI in 2000 has slightly shifted, with the percentage of local programmes reduced by 4 per cent from the figure in 1999, to 63 per cent. In 2001, the channel returned to broadcast a 60 per cent local and 40 per cent imported mix (personal communication with staff at Training and Development Unit of RCTI, Jakarta, January 2003).

Recently, under the new Broadcasting Bill No. 32/2002, article 36 point 2, all national private television stations and public broadcasting are allowed to broadcast at least 60 per cent domestic programmes and as much as 40 per cent imported programmes. Almost all television stations import foreign programmes, mostly movies and teledramas, a few music and variety shows, and some adventure shows and sports programmes.

Every television station has a different policy in its mix of local and imported programmes, though the new regulation has fixed a recommended ratio. For instance, several private channels are still consistent to broadcast foreign contents for about 30 per cent; whereas, one of the new private channels, TV 7,[2] broadcast more (60.9 per cent) foreign imported programmes than local programmes (39.1 per cent) in its programme composition in 2003 (personal communication with Public Relations of TV 7, Jakarta, November 2003).

Although the proportion of local productions on national television at the time of writing (2006) remained around 60 to 70 per cent, and they enjoyed top position in a series of national television programme ratings, foreign drama programmes, particularly those non-Western (Asia Mandarin)

imports, have provided a major source of cultural consumption different to both local productions and their American Hollywood counterparts for viewers in Indonesia. In particular, the Asia Mandarin productions that are continually broadcast in specific timeslots of the national private television stations are positioned in the second rank of the national programming pattern, thus securing a supplementary niche in the domestic television industry. Jhose private stations considered these foreign programmes, especially non-Western productions, to be relatively cheap. Such a widely held perception often created several positive consequences. Many television programme producers speculated a similar success in the bourgeoning television industry in Indonesia.

For instance, soon after *Meteor Garden* was extremely successful in the nation's TV market in 2001–2, the private television station, *Indosiar* (IVM), admitted that the success took them by surprise (interview with the Public Relations manager, Jakarta 2003). According to him, the series was offered to IVM in 2001 for under US$1,000 per episode plus a bonus of two similar dramas, but in VCD version. After four episodes had been screened, the ratings of *Meteor Garden* dramatically increased from being watched by less than 1,000,000 to well over 3,000,000 people. The price of the serial quickly tripled to US$ 6,000 per episode. From the success of the *Meteor Garden* serial, IVM gained US$ 40,000 in advertising revenues per episode broadcast at that time. The show, which was formerly only an hour with an advertisement break, had been stretched to two hours screening with one hour allocated for advertisement spots. Because of the high demand from the audiences and, of course, for profit considerations, *Meteor Garden* was then re-scheduled to the 'super-prime-time' of 8 p.m. He added:

> We predicted this drama would become popular, but not in a short time. We were definitely confused about the taste of the audience. Indeed, it is difficult to detect the taste of Indonesian audiences. It's like hair styles: before, the audiences loved Hollywood [movies]; at present, they like Asian [drama].[3]
>
> (Personal interview, January 2003)

There has also been strong interest in several Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese TV dramas and talent quests as well. The national press coverage and reportage suggests that before 2000 those who liked oriental (i.e. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) television 'idols' were somewhat marginal. After that year they became a part of everyday life, particularly for young urban people who talk about and discuss their preferences for 'idols' and celebrities with oriental looks (Pinidji 2002). There was some speculation (*Bintang Indonesia* 2002) that Asian TV drama titles such as *Meteor Garden*, *Winter Sonata*, or *Meteor Rain*, were popular because these Korean and Taiwanese dramas are more 'down to earth' or rooted in real-life than similar Indonesian productions, so the Indonesian audiences are attracted by the so-called naturalness

of the storylines. Moreover, the similarity of the cultural values seen in these series is familiar to the Indonesian viewers. Perhaps the perceived similarity of cultural values as an Eastern' society allows those Asian cultural products to be accepted without a concern that they will undermine or challenge the ideological and cultural foundation of Indonesia. Do the real audiences say the same thing? The rest of this chapter will examine how viewers of the Asian drama feel about and view this issue.

Iwabuchi's (2002) study on the popularization of Japanese cultural production in Taiwan and the reception of viewers has shown that the cultural proximity thesis is still relevant in determining the taste and values of local Asian viewers to consume their neighbour's productions. For Iwabuchi, the share of memory and history among Asian people is also another significant factor why Japanese productions are well liked. Moreover, Iwabuchi argues that the export of Japanese popular culture to Asian markets, for instance, signals the acceptance of Japanese cultural dissemination in the regions and articulates 'the indelibility of Japan's imperial history, unresolved issues of Japanese war responsibility, and its lingering economic exploitation of the region' (Iwabuchi 2002: 75).

Following on from the 'cultural proximity' thesis of Straubhaar (1991, 1997), Iwabuchi also discovered that Asian (in this case, Taiwanese) viewers tend to see the images of Japanese TV dramas in terms of their assumed cultural proximity (Iwabuchi 2002: 56). From this study, Iwabuchi summarizes that the cultural flows from 'the non-Western semi-centre' and the rise of the economic power of transnational media corporations in a global space, have shown alternative patterns of transnationalization of media and popular culture from those non-Western countries to their regional markets under the banner of locality, that is 'a non-Western mode of indigenized modernity for culturally and/or geographically contiguous nations' (Iwabuchi 2002: 48). Although the thesis of cultural proximity provides a critical basis to test or understand the circumstances of the popularity of East Asian cultural productions in Asian regions, as in Lee's (1998) thesis mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the consumption by local audiences could be different along age, class, and gender division, each determining a different reading of those imported texts, which will be the focus of the subsequent sections.

A Case of '*Meteor Garden* Fever' in Indonesia

The success of Taiwanese TV series production *Meteor Garden* was remarkable in Indonesia during 2002–3. Four young Taiwanese males: Jerry Yan, Vic Zhou, Vanness Wu, and Ken Zhu attracted not only the teenagers, but also many housewives. When these male actors-cum-singers came to Indonesia in January 2003 for their concert tour, it was reported that 70,000 tickets were sold, at prices ranging from 500,000 rupiahs (US$50[4]) to 2,000,000 rupiahs (US$200) for VVIP (Pinidji 2002). In fact, there were two

contrasting major events with large emotional crowds at two different places in Jakarta on that day. One was the long queue of *Meteor Garden*'s fans at the Kemayoran Jakarta Fair grounds for a concert of these teenage idols. Dozens of the VVIP seats were also reserved for the families of former President Megawati and her Vice Presidential Hamzah Haz. In contrast, at the other place surrounding the *Merdeka* square across from the presidential palace of *Istana Merdeka*, thousands of demonstrators, mainly industrial labourers and other low-paid workers, protested against the increased costs of three vital household expenses: electricity, fuel, and telephone.

The first series of *Meteor Garden* consisted of 19 one-hour episodes and was originally broadcast in Korea and Taiwan in 2000–2001. The drama revolves around the love lives of four young males and a female in contemporary Taiwan. The female major character, San Cai, is a poor and attractive university student who attracts the attention of many males. She falls in love with Dao Ming Tse, a rough-turned-gentle, wealthy and glamorous man, whose life follows the pace of urban Taiwan modernity, but he is described as conservative in his views about sexual relationships. Dao Ming Tse is portrayed as a stereotypical 'Prince Charming' figure. He is a hero for his girlfriend, San Cai. While Dao Ming Tse is depicted as loyal and determined with his lover; San Cai is pictured as having another relationship with Hua Zhei Lie, who is a close friend of Dao Ming Tse, her boyfriend. The drama ends with the reunion of Dao Ming Tse and San Cai. Following the success of its first run, the Korean producer made the second series of *Meteor Garden*. In Indonesia, this series was not as successful as the first.

The sudden appearance of *Meteor Garden* in the living rooms of many urban households in Indonesia during 2002 and 2003 was a remarkable phenomenon. The attraction of the drama is related to the physical performance of the four Taiwanese male university student characters: Dao Ming Tse is the hero, a rich and powerful male; Hua Zhei Lei is the sensitive one; Xi Men is a playboy and flamboyant; and Mei Zhuo is an attractive boy. Dao Ming Tse became a 'new hero' role model for young female viewers in Indonesia. The appearance and hairstyle of Dao Ming Tse were adopted as a new fashion trend among teenagers and university males and females. In her study, Pravitta (2004) describes how *Meteor Garden* attracted the Indonesian (female) viewers because of the way the male characters were depicted. She demonstrates that the features of a good-looking male, stylistic, trendy, nice, not rude, not having a tattoo, non-smoker, with an ideal physical look, had become a dream figure of the viewers (Pravitta 2004: 6–7).

The popularity of the drama urged some university undergraduate students to conduct research on why *Meteor Garden* was so popular in Indonesia. For instance, Pravitta's (2004) study on the reception of *Meteor Garden* among the undergraduate female students in Yogyakarta suggests that those four Taiwanese males unexpectedly showed the viewers the

distinct look of the 'mainstream' Oriental (i.e. Chinese) males. The viewers maintained that they were pleasantly surprised to see (Oriental) Asian TV stars whose physical appearance and acting on the screen were different from Hollywood counterparts. According to Pravitta, the males fascinated the viewers because they provided an 'alternative' to the dominant Western stars (Pravitta 2004: 7). Swastika and Andari (2003) also conducted an audience survey of the *Meteor Garden* viewers in Yogyakarta. They found that the admiration of the audiences toward the drama mainly went on the physical looks of the stars, who were viewed as cool, trendy, handsome, and typical of contemporary oriental 'modern' or 'new age' males.

University female viewers in Yogyakarta found the Oriental male characters charming, because they appear to practice the so-called 'Eastern values' (*nilai-nilai ketimuran*), particularly the restrained sexual relationships. For these viewers, these behaviour and values are rarely found in today's Asia. Those Taiwanese male characters in *Meteor Garden* were rarely shown lip-kissing their loved ones. Even though they sleep in one bed with their girlfriends, they never have sex, as commonly shown in many Hollywood productions (Pravitta 2004: 10). The viewers also liked the creation of the 'boyish' cultures, which controlled behaviours and guarded the traditional cultural norms of being an 'Eastern' people, though the characters live in 'modern times'. The construction of such young urban contemporary Taiwanese male figures is uncommon in Hollywood products. In addition, the commitment among those four young males and the female heroine to the notion of virginity is highly valued by those university female viewers, despite the reportedly high levels of extra and pre-marital sexual affairs among Indonesian urban youths.

In addition, the study by Swastika and Andari (2003) shows that the attention of the viewers to the featured Oriental males conforms to existing stereotypes. The character, Dao Ming Tse, for instance, was seen by the audiences as having an ideal posture, as being loyal, determined, caring, and chaste. At the same time he shows his ability to be both gentle to the female characters whom he loves, and be harsh to the villains. His straightforward expression of feelings is an object of admiration for the female audiences. The character of Hua Che Lei was liked by the teenagers for his wisdom and refinement. The Xi Men character, was admired because of his maturity, loyalty, gentleness, and because he wore glasses. As observed in the study by Swastika and Andari, teenage male viewers also showed a different reaction to that of their female counterparts. When girls watched the drama, they always commented on both the physical appearance and acting style of the stars in the show, while the boy viewers tended to laugh when the show was funny, or comment on the storyline, if they thought it was illogical or did not make sense for them (Swastika and Andari 2003: 3). Moreover, those girl viewers tended to relate their personal experiences in social relationships to the storylines in the show, and continued to talk

about the story with friends who also watched the show. These patterns were not observed amongst the boys.

The observation above suggests that the attractiveness of the *Meteor Garden* series lies mainly in the physical appearance of the actors and the creations of the ego ideals of the fictional characters. The capability of the producer and the story-makers to build and articulate the ideal images of 'Prince Charming' and a male hero has fascinated the females' fantasy and imagination about the ideal male figure. Thus, the consumption pleasure of this Asian production remains in the story itself and in the characters created just as in local productions.

The Engagement of the *Kampung* Audience with *Meteor Garden*

Television reception is a complex process, one that cannot be simply summarized either by the term 'resistance' or by the terms 'passivity' and 'accommodation' (Press 1991: 174). In their classic work on *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz (1990) assert that content analysis, however sophisticated, cannot explain how messages are viewed, interpreted, and discussed by the viewers. Study of the relationships between the texts and the viewers is vital. They contend that viewing television is not merely a passive activity in which the audience is simply influenced by what is shown on television; rather it is the process of an active and involving experience, which varies with the cultural backgrounds that individuals carry to the viewing. In this sense, ideology is not created simply as a process of stimuli–responses; rather it is formed through the process of negotiation between the producers and the viewers. Such a study of television viewing is complicated by the decoding process. Consequently, the effects of television messages will vary within any society that consists of different ethnic and cultural communities (Liebes and Katz 1990). Morley also notes that, 'there will always be individual, private readings, but we need to investigate the extent to which these individual readings are patterned into cultural differential interpretations ... showing how members of different groups and classes, share different "cultural codes"' (Morley 1986: 14–15).

Morley (1986) and Lull (1988) have investigated family television viewing patterns both in Western and Chinese contexts. Both Morley and Lull show how television is used as a social resource for daily conversation among family members. Their studies describe how television use reproduces gendered relations of power in family life. They argue that the experience of watching television also varies in regards to gendered relations. Ang (1985), Hermes (1995), and Press (1991) are amongst those who have explored whether and how gender disrupts the ways women consume media in their everyday life. Ang and Hermes (1996), for instance, found in a study of a media audience that issues of gender identity and media consumption take place in actual situations in which 'gender positions are taken up by which men and women, with what identificatory investment, and as a result of which specific articulation' (Ang and Hermes 1996: p. 339).

In the Indonesian context, watching television is not merely the privilege of families who own televisions; instead, the experience is a shared one. People watch television with neighbours. This is particularly common amongst the lower classes of people who live in *kampung* areas. As such this study explores the phenomenon of communal viewing in *kampungs*, which is uncommon in the context of Western 'neighbourship' (Sullivan 1994:17). Utilizing the particularities of the cultural place and space of the viewers, i. e. *kampung*-class people, the following section discusses how this community engaged and assessed the televised cultural construction of different culture and class backgrounds.

Kampung caters for mostly low and lower-middle income families. According to Sullivan (1994), the *kampung* people tend to view themselves as 'not-rich' people, but 'not exactly poor', as the word 'poor' has an unpleasant connotation in the *kampung*. *Kampung* people are identified as *wong cilik* (Javanese for 'little people') or *wong kampung* ('*kampung* people'), which refers to their lower class position (Guinness 1989; Sullivan 1994). The opposite of 'little people' is either *wong gede* ('big people') that refers to better-off classes living outside the *kampung* or *wong gedongan*[5] (the 'streetsiders') living along a street as opposed to those living within the *kampung* where there is only footpath access.

However, the class division between *wong kampung* and *wong gedongan* does not fully define the distinction between the *kampung* community (known as *kampungan*) and non-*kampung* community (known as *gedongan*). The term '*kampungan-gedongan*' (Sullivan 1992: 117) refers to the difference between communal (*kampung*) insiders and non-communal outsiders. 'It marks a distinction between communal and non-communal elements which does not align at all cleanly with class division' (Sullivan 1992: 17). In fact, *gedongan* does not merely cover those 'streetsider' upper classes, many of whom are not more affluent than the *kampung* members and do not belong to local upper classes. ' [T]he *kampungan* category excludes many underclass elements, while the *gedongan* category includes underclass elements. The figure does not mirror the *wong cilik-wong gede* distinction' (Sullivan 1992: 117).

Urban *kampung* communities live in converged socio-cultural circumstances. As most of the occupants are rural migrants, they still maintain their own traditional manners and customs, while at the same time they adapt to a 'modern' lifestyle. Some have suggested that this is why *kampung* culture lacks 'refinement and manners' (Guinness 1989: 56), and the notion *kampungan* is used by the educated and urban elite culture to indicate behaviour that is rude or unsophisticated. Based on such an understanding, it is my observation that while urban *kampung* women negotiate their own identities within their lived experience, they also need to negotiate the representations shown on television, particularly with representations of 'other' culture and people. I argue that these televisual representations are simultaneously part of their everyday practices while also contradicting their everyday lives and gendered identities.

Considering these *kampung* socio-cultural elements, I observed the viewing experience of female audiences of the second series of *Meteor Garden*, which was screened between February and June 2003. Although this group was not the target audience in the eyes of the television station, and that they were ignored by media corporations, these viewers were always in front of the TV set to watch the show every Thursday evening.

My field work took place in Kampung Gubeng, a large, urban, middle to lower-class settlement in the eastern area of the city of Surabaya. It is one of many similar small *kampung* lanes in the sub-district (*Kecamatan*) of Gubeng. It contains 40 households, of whom some are migrants, some are descendants of the *kampung*'s elderly, and a few are boarding residents. The *kampung*, both as a lived and culturally constructed space, exemplifies a model of marginal community in the migratory landscape of an Indonesian urban settlement.

The following narrative is based on my interviews and informal conversations with several *kampung* women aged between 25 and 40 years. The *kampung* inhabitants articulated ideas and images about '*wong kampung*' (*kampung* people) into their own desires, lives, and interpretations of both their subjective and communal experiences. As those *kampung* people have existentially engaged in fashioning their own lives neither as rural nor urban/city subjects, their narratives shape the particularity of the cultural scene of the marginalized urban subjects. I take their circumstances into consideration when appraising the significance of class-culture as a basis of different meaning systems in the viewing process. This is particularly relevant, as there are not only some cultural differences, but also a class difference between the portrayals shown in the foreign drama production and those of the viewers. Moreover, communal (neighbourhood) television viewing, in a *kampung* is common practice. Viewers watch television in their neighbour's home, while talking about other neighbours or other matters of interest. Usually, three or more neighbours come and sit on the floor and watch the same programme. Hence, the way the viewers express their value-judgements towards the televised portrayals is also influenced by the cultural values and experiences of their community.

I regularly met with several *kampung* women and watched and talked about *Meteor Garden* series 2 with them. Three housewives and two female university students who boarded in the house sat around the TV set of one *kampung* household. From this experience, I heard the viewers' different perspectives on the television show. Unlike the two university students, whose admiration went so much on the physical appearance of the stars and the depictions of the Taiwanese male characters, the attention of the women in their thirties was more casual and restrained. These housewives watched the show as they were curious as to why the media had bombarded them with so much information about the so-called *Meteor Garden* fever. In fact, the *kampung* women viewers realized that the storyline of this series barely differed from the drama style of many locally produced Indonesian dramas.

For the *kampung* women, there is nothing special about the programme. One *kampung* woman, aged 27, told me that the textual appeal of the drama is similar to many Indonesian melodramatic *sinetron*. However, she added, strong characters in Indonesian *sinetron* are mainly female. In many Indonesian *sinetron*, female characters often find themselves in a conflict, usually between a 'gorgeous' woman versus an 'evil' woman. *Meteor Garden*, though, is markedly different: young male characters are the central focus. This viewer also recognized that in other Asian Mandarin dramas, such as *Winter Sonata* and *Endless Love*, both Korean productions, the role of women is not that strong. For her, viewers of Indonesian *sinetron* watch for the intrigues and conflicts among the upper-class. She said:

> *Meteor* is like a *sinetron*, actually. The rich are exposed in great detail. They live in mansions, full of *glamour* [in original]. But watching *Meteor* is different, because no rich women ever fight for her inheritance (*warisan*) as women do in *sinetron*. *Meteor* is about 'puppy love', simple and funny. . . . *Sinetrons* are mostly about adultery, love affairs, boredom. . . . Well, they [*Meteor Garden* and *sinetron*] are all fictional, though.

The female *kampung* viewers might not watch dramas from Taiwan, Korea, and Japan because they prefer to watch the local *sinetron*. However, several Asian teledramas such as *Meteor Garden*, *Winter Sonata*, and *Endless Love* that the women had watched seemed to present something attractive and pleasurable. The viewers recognize their different qualities from the locally produced television melodramas. From the viewer's statement above, it appears that this audience may reject or oppose the drama presentation because of the vicious or critical appeal of the cultural values of their own society. For the *kampung* viewers, even though the drama is fictional and dream-like, 'puppy love' is seen as part of 'real' everyday life of university students and it is more pleasurable to watch than the adultery-focused *sinetron*.

The female *kampung* viewers I spoke with found no features and characters that distinguish Taiwanese drama from the Indonesian serials with regards to issues of modernity and urban lifestyle. Some of these *kampung* women commented to me that *Meteor Garden* showed the culture of Taiwanese middle-class boys and their romantic lives. These are features that can also be found in Indonesian television drama productions. However, for these viewers, in representing everyday lives of ordinary people the television drama series from Taiwan and other parts of East Asia have something that distinguishes them from the Indonesian counterparts. Another female *kampung* viewer, aged 29, explained this distinctive feature in the following terms: in Indonesian dramas, members of a rich family are always presented wearing formal outfits, while in *Meteor Garden*, members of the family wear casual clothes, except Dao Ming Tse's mother. She also remarked: 'Look at Dao Ming Tse, he only wears a t-shirt, jeans and has an ordinary hairstyle'.

According to this viewer, the everyday life of the rich should not be stereotypical and exaggerated. It does not make sense if the rich families always wear formal suits and gowns and shoes in the house. In Indonesian *sinetron*, she argued, 'everything is overdone, it does not look real, it's really fictional … well, all films are fictional'. This woman and her two neighbours who watched *Meteor Garden* series 2 on the night I saw them agreed that they did not know how rich people live. In their cultural practice, people would usually wear very casual or informal clothes at home. Presumably, they would keep and wear their fine clothes only for going out, for shopping, or attending formal occasions such as wedding parties and other community celebrations. They reasoned that such outfits were expensive and they only had a few themselves, so it would be a waste to wear them at home. As the main characters in *Meteor Garden*, particularly Dao Ming Tse and Hua Zhe Lei and their friends, are depicted in casual outfits and appearances, the viewers think that this Taiwanese series is more about 'real' people and everyday life than those seen in *sinetron*.

In addition, as each *Meteor Garden* series consists of 19 episodes – short by Indonesian standards – the storyline seems less complicated than Indonesian melodramatic *sinetron.* During my fieldwork the most popular drama was *Tersanjung* (Flattered), which had more than 200 episodes. The relatively short and straightforward storyline of *Meteor Garden* enabled the viewers to easily follow the narrative. According to one of the viewers, this difference makes the Indonesian *sinetron* feel like never-ending tales. New episodes are created as long as ratings are high.

What to Consume from Taiwanese Commodities

The two female university students that I interviewed expressed how much they liked *Meteor Garden*. They claim never to have missed a single episode mainly because the stars were cute, good looking, muscular, and romantic. In response, the three housewives commented to them that many Indonesian male stars also look like those 'oriental' stars. One woman aged 29, a wife and mother of three small children, even went as far as saying cynically: 'I wonder why many young girls like this boy [Dao Ming Tse] … It's funny. Girls like F4, but still they don't like Chinese [in Indonesia]! … They only like to see a Chinese male on TV.'

The phenomenon of '*Meteor Garden* fever' among young women in Indonesia has caused speculation about whether young Indonesians have changed their attitude to be more accepting of people of Chinese descent or whether this phenomenon is just a matter of trend among young consumers. Those four young Taiwanese actors Jerry Yan (playing the role of Dao Ming Tse), Vic Zhou (as Hua Zhe Lei), Ken Zhu (as Xi Men), and Vanness Wu (as Mei Zhuo) were the main attraction of the Taiwanese drama, *Meteor Garden*, for Indonesian viewers. However, comments from the *kampung* woman above suggest that the attitude of young Indonesians toward

the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia remains the same. In other words, those four Taiwanese actors – indispensable to the pleasure of the drama watching and the music they bring to Indonesia – can only attract the domestic consumer culture with no direct impacts on the perceptions of Chineseness that are highly problematic in their country. The oriental (Taiwanese) look and its cultural productions are no more than an exotic object of consumption.

For the female *kampung* viewers, the Taiwanese (i.e. foreign) production is not an additional source of information about other peoples and cultures worth learning about and from. To them, except featuring good-looking Taiwanese male idols, *Meteor Garden* provides no clue about 'other' cultural contents that are different and inaccessible in Indonesia, be it food, fashion, or other consumer goods. As mentioned above, the perception of the *kampung*'s middle to lower-class viewers toward this Taiwanese production is no different from that to Indonesian *sinetron*. The urban *kampung* audiences are used to the representations of urban, metropolitan landscapes, middle- and upper-class urbanites, their stereotypical lifestyles, the furniture, and other consumer goods shown in the locally produced *sinetron*, which mainly feature metropolitan Jakartans and how they live their lives. There are barely any Taiwanese commodities seen in the *Meteor Garden* series that are foreign to Indonesian audience.

The one cultural difference in the Taiwanese drama series that these viewers noticed is how the goods are not only used as a symbolic icon of a stunning lifestyle of the upper-class. These viewers recognized that furniture and other expensive household items in Indonesian *sinetron* are presented mainly as decorative elements, while in *Meteor Garden*, some household items such as a TV, refrigerator and other electronic devices are actually used by the characters in the drama. As one 27-year-old woman says, '[r]ich people in *sinetron* seem never to watch television. I have never seen television set in the rich family home in *sinetron*. Or may be rich people do not like to watch TV, not like us. For us TV is important and we watch it everyday.' This viewer realized that she could not find scenes in many *sinetron* showing how people actually consume goods.

Becoming Culturally Proximate?

As I observed during my research, domestic Indonesian audiences spoke most eagerly about the story and the characters of the Asian dramas. Contemporary Asian television dramas are diverse in terms of storylines, setting, and topics, which range from urban love stories to family dramas. However, those that become popular in Indonesia are stories of the love-lives of young people in urban settings. Thus, they are similar to Indonesian teledramas. However, unlike the younger generation, female urban *kampung* viewers prefer to watch local *sinetron*, particularly the 'comedy-dramas' that present middle to lower-classes of particular ethnic communities and the 'legend-colossal' dramas that present the periods of pre-modern Indonesia. This is because they present

attractive and more pleasurable meanings that local audiences do not recognize in watching foreign productions.

When watching *Meteor Garden* series 2, the urban middle to lower-class audiences also recognized that the cultural values and norms shown in the series are quite similar to the beliefs and values held by their society. Those *kampung* viewers acknowledged that the values of respecting the elderly, refraining from sex outside marriage, no kissing, and women being polite and patient also occur in the Indonesian context. One woman told me that she liked how Dao Ming Tse did not attempt to have sexual relations with his girlfriend, even though they were sharing the same bed.

Gender appraisal becomes obvious in the way the female *kampung* viewers respond to the representation of male–female relationships. One of the reasons why those women viewers watch *Meteor Garden* is that this drama features an idealized figure of the male hero. That is, someone who is good-looking, strong, and romantic and will take risks to protect his loved one from being victimized both by his own mother and his male friends. A woman with two small sons told me:

> I was impressed when Dao Ming Tse carried San Cai (his girlfriend) after being hurt by the male rascal. ... He also stood by his girlfriend when his mother mistreated her in his house ... A man should be like that ... he should protect a woman ... He even still demands [female] virginity. That's why he never touched his girl, well, sometimes they kiss, but that is ordinary.

These features impressed the female viewers who found the drama highly pleasing, as it presents the positive appeal of cultural values to which that audience already subscribes. A familiar cultural value – even though it is stereotypical and gender-biased – does offer pleasure to those watching foreign (non-Western) productions. Hence, from this cultural experience, the domestic audiences seem to think that the cultural values and the norms contained and promoted in that Taiwanese drama production have 'cultural similarity' with their (domestic viewers) socio-cultural circumstances. As the values of virginity, no sex outside marriage, friendship and loyalty are firmly planted in the narrative of the drama, the attractiveness of *Meteor Garden* appears to be based upon the sense of 'our' (Asian/non-Western) culture.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that 'cultural proximity' is entirely present in the analysis of the popularity of East Asian (Mandarin) programmes in Indonesian television. Rather, I would suggest that the appreciation of a foreign media text, to some extent, does not exclusively depend on the degree of the cultural values represented or the textual intimacy, but also on the attractiveness of the stars' appearance and the creation of characters. Moreover, the influence of media promotions and publicity significantly contributes to an audience's choice to watch the show. As such, the liberalization on the consumption of Mandarin/Chinese pop cultures in

Indonesia has also encouraged the domestic consumers to appreciate the productions.

Although the distinctive features of traditional 'Asian culture' were acknowledged by the audiences, particular demographical backgrounds such as gender, age, and class-culture have different impacts upon the audience's reception of the same text. Therefore, the intersection of cultural proximity in relation to the pleasure of the text needs to consider the significance of cultural context of the audiences. Lee (1998) suggests that the audience of the receiving country does not adopt and respond to the foreign programme contents in one single way: 'that the audience will learn and adopt the behaviours of imported television in a wholesale manner. Without this learning and adopting process, there is no way to form a "global culture" through sameness' (Lee 1998: 277).

Conclusion

Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham (1996) theorize that the success of a 'peripheral nation's export' is contingent on factors such as cultural and geographical proximity. The success of East Asian 'Mandarin' serials, as a 'new resource' of non-Western imported programmes in Indonesian television, not only consists of alternative programmes for the domestic audiences, but they have also provided the domestic viewers with a sense of familiarity with their own cultural values and practices. These foreign programmes have become a supplement to the many local productions, as well as alternative source of programmes in contemporary Indonesian television industry.

Indeed, the Indonesian government, through Broadcasting Law number 32/2002, has restricted the foreign content on national programming – a policy intended to protect the domestic television and entertainment industries. In fact, while the local shows are still overwhelmingly the most popular in Indonesia, some foreign imported productions draw a substantial audience. Perhaps foreign programmes on Indonesian national private TV stations these days are primarily used as a means of capturing audience size to reap profits for the television station.

Nevertheless, the popularity in Indonesia of Asian television productions, such as *Meteor Garden*, suggests that non-Western sources have captivated local/domestic audiences and have created a new programming pattern for the Indonesian television industry in the post-authoritarian era. The rating trend and the appeal of 'new' stars from Asian Mandarin countries for Indonesian audiences follow the trend away from American fandom and programming intensity.

Global cultural formations have to some extent affected the local/domestic site of television programming and consumption in Indonesia. However, foreign TV programmes, particularly those non-Western (Asian Mandarin) imports, have provided different sources of cultural consumption to both local productions and their American Hollywood counterparts. In particular,

the Asian Mandarin productions that are continually broadcast in specific timeslots of the national private television stations. They took the second position of the national programming ranking, and found a supplementary niche in the domestic television market, which has been 'spellbound' with locally produced television dramas. Moreover, the attractiveness of the Asian Mandarin productions, particularly the *Meteor Garden* series, for the local/domestic audiences certainly has little to do with images associated with the country of origins; rather it is more due to the values of Asian/non-Western cultural values contained in the narratives of the stories.

Notes

1 'Asia Mandarin and Asia non-Mandarin' are terms used by the television stations and Indonesian AC-Nielsen Media Research to categorize foreign programs imported from Greater China countries such as People Republic of China, Hong Kong [sic], Korea [sic], and Taiwan, and to differentiate from other Asian countries like Thailand, India, and Japan.
2 Since August 2006, *TV 7* has merged with *Trans TV*, which is owned by Chairul Tanjung of Para Group. Tanjung is a new media baron in Indonesia. As a result of the merger, *TV 7* changed its name to *Trans 7*.
3 All translations from Indonesian are by the author.
4 Given the decline of the value of Indonesian Rupiah following the 1997 economic crisis, the price was incredible compared with, for instance, the salary of a lower-level civil servant or a labourer of about US$50 a month.
5 *Gedongan*, from the Javanese word *gedong* means 'substantial bricks or stone buildings' (Sullivan 1992: 110). For more discussion on *kampung* class and hierarchy see Sullivan (1992) and Guinness (1986).

6 Fame, fortune, *Fantasi*
Indonesian Idol and the new celebrity

Penelope Coutas

Nearly every television station in Indonesia broadcasts reality television programmes, and in the past few years there have been over 50 different reality shows produced locally but often based on or inspired by foreign formats. Replacing direct foreign imports in many cases, format adaptations of reality shows are one example of Indonesia's participation in global television and are a prominent feature of the television landscape in post-Suharto Indonesia. Although there is extensive debate over what is actually meant by reality television, the defining characteristic of the genre is that programmes are largely unscripted, the stars being real people in extraordinary circumstances who are often competing for the chance to improve their lives (Hill 2005). Reality shows also allow viewers to 'see for themselves', which has become a key attraction, changing the relationship between viewer and screen into something more intimate and participatory than ever before.

According to ratings statistics, the periodical press, and as evidenced by fanbases, the most popular reality programmes in Indonesia to date are singer–performer talent quests such as RCTI's *Indonesian Idol*, Indosiar's *Akademi Fantasi Indosiar* (*AFI*, Indosiar's Fantasy Academy) and TPI's *Kontes Dangdut Indonesia* (*KDI*, *Dangdut* Contest Indonesia). The success of these programmes has inspired spin-offs in other talent areas such as comedy, bands, acting, television presenting, and even knowledge of the Islamic faith. Of these, *Indonesian Idol* is often regarded by fans and viewers in magazines and online forums as 'the original and the best' due to its 'global glamour' and possibilities for international stardom, and it has been identified by producers and advertisers as one of the most popular reality show imports. For these reasons, *Indonesian Idol* is the focus of this study, although *AFI* and *KDI* are used as interesting points of contrast throughout.

The following will present an analysis of a new genre of contemporary celebrity in Indonesia created through reality television programmes such as *Indonesian Idol*, and examine different frameworks for approaching the fame, fortune, and *fantasi* of the show. *Indonesian Idol* is a rich source for exploring issues of celebrity production and consumption in Indonesia today, and for examining the notion of the 'active, interactive audience' within a context of globalization and increasing commercialization of cultural

products and practices. Although the imaginings, meanings, and images created in and by the show may at first glance seem representative of cultural imperialism, the distinction between the 'global' and the 'local' is highly problematic, and the interactive nature of *Indonesian Idol* leads to questions of audience agency and power. *Indonesian Idol* is promoted as making the celebrity process explicit and as an example of a new, participatory, viewer–screen relationship in a glamorous, global context. But to what extent is this really the case, and what does it all mean?

Behind the Scenes: a Background to *Indonesian Idol* and the *Idola*

Indonesian Idol, based on the United Kingdom's *Pop Idol*, is a four-stage talent quest for singers and begins with televised regional auditions. In Indonesia, these take place in Ambon, Bandung, Jakarta, Manado, Medan, Makassar, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta where more than 250 from over 25,000 wannabes are chosen by RCTI and FremantleMedia executives to appear before four judges each season. A selection of those contestants then audition in Jakarta for Stage Two, where they are whittled down to 30 by the judges. After this, the interactivity begins with viewers choosing the final 12 via SMS on their mobile phones. By this point, the singers have been carefully styled and viewers are shown clips of them selecting their outfits with the stylists and practicing with voice coaches: the 'behind the scenes' footage that helps build viewer–contestant relationships (Holmes 2004b). Finally, there is the fourth stage, during which the final 12 contestants perform week after week as the participant with the least votes is ejected from the competition. Viewers have just over one hour between the contestants' performances in the *Spektakuler* and close of polls in the *Result Show* to vote via SMS, an essential element of the programme. No matter who is chosen and who is eliminated though, the final 12 performers have already made the transition to stardom through the mediated experience of the reality show: they have become *Idola*.

As a genre of representation, the *Idola* are a new form of celebrity: talented real people who achieve fame via reality television. This is not a phenomenon unique to Indonesia, and resembles Chris Rojek's (2001: 18) description of 'celetoids' who move from maximum visibility in television and magazine to complete obscurity within a matter of weeks. According to Rojek, celebrity status comes in three forms: 'ascribed' through blood relations (royal families, for example), 'achieved' in open competition (sports stars), or 'attributed' by the media (television and film personalities), and this forms a useful framework in which to position a discussion of *Indonesian Idol*'s fame process. Although there have been numerous studies conducted on celebrity and celebrification in Western academia, notably Boorstin (1963), Turner (2004), Marshall (1997), Gamson (1994), and Dyer and McDonald (1998), there has been little discourse concerning the celebrity process and industry in Indonesia.

Amrih Widodo (1991: 4) began a discussion of the 'celebrification of Indonesian culture' in the *Bernas* newspaper in the early 1990s. He tells us that the word '*selebriti*' originates from the English 'celebrity' meaning 'a person who is easily recognized by many people from many backgrounds, and often appears or becomes news in the mass media'. There is some argument over whether the term *selebriti* or *selebritas* is more *baik dan benar* (i.e. proper Indonesian; Wardhana 2004), but it is interesting to note that neither *selebriti* nor *selebritas* appears in Echols and Shadily's (1998) popular dictionaries: a 'celebrity' is instead translated as '*seorang yang terkenal*' (someone who is well known). Well known for their well knownness, perhaps? Here we find the difference between *bintang* (stars) and *selebritas* (celebrities). A *selebritas* is not necessarily a *bintang* in their field in that they are 'the best' at something. Likewise, a *bintang* may not be a *selebritas* in that a *selebritas*' life is highly visible through the media, their private lives attracting just as much interest as their professional. What is somewhat unique to Indonesia is that *selebritas* are not just film-stars, athletes, and television personalities, but also politicians, academics, and religious leaders: the lines between *bintang* and *selebritas* are much more blurred than in Western popular culture.

What distinguishes *Indonesian Idol* and similar talent quest shows from other reality television programming in Indonesia is the emphasis on the 'democratic' voting system via SMS to 'elect' the *Idola*, and this in turn distinguishes the *Idola* from *bintang* and *selebritas*.[1] More will be said about the voting system later, but in terms of the *Idola* process, the idea of an audition process followed by a democratic vote is very important: the potential upwards social mobility afforded by these shows is promoted as being meritocratic. In 2004, Merdikaningtyas (2004: 3) discovered that many participants viewed the programmes and the audition processes as a form of free education, and were seriously considering a career in the entertainment industry because of *AFI* and *Indonesian Idol*. *The Jakarta Post* also commented on this change of career aspirations in a series of articles in late 2004 and concluded that in the past, parents wanted their children to be doctors, engineers, lawyers, or economists. With the passing of time and the advance of technology, however, more and more fathers and mothers do not mind their offspring becoming idols, actors, or vocalists. (Ryanto 2004).

Hence, there is the perception that through reality television anyone can be famous, if only for a short time. To return briefly to Rojek's (2001) categories then, *Idola* fame is both achieved and attributed. On one hand, to become an *Idola*, the potential star must win a competition and be the best at something even if it is 'being the best' at gaining SMS votes, rather than singing ability, yet on the other, that fame is often 'attributed' by the media 'moment' or 'spectacle', and is dependent on media coverage. *Idola* have not replaced *bintang* or *selebritas*, but rather extended the field of possibilities. To what extent though, is this celebrity status simply a construction

produced 'from above'? Are the *Idola* only commodities traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries for specific purposes?

The *Idola* Image

The *Idola* presented to the public are controlled by 'cultural intermediaries', the collective term used by Rojek (2001) to describe agents, publicists, marketing personnel, promoters, photographers, wardrobe staff, and personal assistants. These people all have a role in creating the *Idola* image, as do the *Idola* themselves. They decide what clothes the *Idola* wear, how their hair is styled, how and what they sing: what 'image' of celebrity is presented during the course of the show. In developing the *Idola* image, however, producers are the most powerful cultural intermediaries. As Abercrombie (1996: 110) describes, the producers act as the link between the creative and commercial aspects of television. They are managers who wield substantial power, but they also act as collaborators in the creative processes. In *Indonesian Idol*'s case, the producers are from two different agencies: the national, conservative, Indonesian television station RCTI, and the international production companies FremantleMedia and its affiliate 19 Management, who created and own the *Idol* format.

The *Idol* format is the most profitable one FremantleMedia and 19 Management have ever produced and distributed. A record-breaking 1.5 billion votes have been cast worldwide for the format, which is now produced in over 30 countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia in Asia. According to *Gatra* magazine (Guritno, Khudori, Yanuarti, Sawariyanto, & Fitriyah 2004), the show cost RCTI tens of billions of rupiah ($1AUD /Rp. 7,000) to produce because FremantleMedia set a very high price for format rights. The format also came with a manual of strict instructions that must be adhered to, and so RCTI had to buy new editing equipment and employ a specialist crew in order to meet its strict specifications. In many ways, the format itself, and not the people working within it, constitutes the most powerful cultural intermediary where *Indonesian Idol* is concerned.

In its most straightforward definition, 'a television format is a template or set of invariable elements in a programme out of which the variable elements of individual episodes are produced' (Moran 2004: 5). *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *Siapa Takut Jatuh Cinta?* (*Who's Afraid of Falling in Love?*), Taiwan's *Meteor Garden*), *Famili 100* (*Family Feud*) and *Indonesian Idol* are just a few examples of imported formats that have enjoyed ratings success in Indonesia. With formats, the idea for the show is imported and not the show itself, as it is with direct imports of subtitled or dubbed programmes. The framework may be foreign, but the story is local. This is important because, in the last decade, television ratings the world over have confirmed that, when given a choice, audiences prefer domestic and regional content to foreign programmes (Waisbord 2004: 369). Formats are one

effective way for television stations to cater for this fact, and so it is no coincidence that in 1999 television stations in Indonesia had more 'local' content than ever before. During the Monetary Crisis, imports became prohibitively expensive and, consequently, the format trade boomed, particularly with quiz show formats. In a survey of television guides from 2000 to mid-2005, local programming becomes even more pronounced from 2004 onwards in the form of reality television shows based on or 'inspired by' international formats. And it is through these shows that we see the emergence of the *Idola*. In the case of *Indonesian Idol*, it is clearly the TV series that constructs, promotes, and promises the concept of the *Idola* prior to their immersion in the music industry, and it is the imported format that makes the show a commercial success. However, as Kitley (2004: 154) explains, 'cultural technology transfers of this type are not gifts, and are structured with the provider's profit as the prime consideration'.

As a commodity, the *Idola* are products to be marketed in their own right or to be used to market other commodities: the advertising potential of *Indonesian Idol* and the *Idola* is extremely high. According to RCTI's marketing director Daniel Hartono, advertising revenue had already exceeded 150 per cent of expectations halfway through the 2004 season. In fact, *Indonesian Idol* had become the biggest media event for RCTI in three years and was close to eclipsing their broadcast of the Soccer World Cup in terms of advertising revenue (Guritno *et al.* 2004: 31). *Gatra* and *Tempo* magazines, Indonesia's answers to *TIME*, recognized this trend in 2004 and published a series of articles related to *AFI* and *Indonesian Idol* (Basral & Chudori 2004; Guritno *et al.* 2004). Gatra made the following speculation about advertising:

> On a Friday night slot, when *Indonesian Idol* airs, RCTI sets the price at Rp. 18,000,000 per 30 second ad spot. Expensive? This is prime time, man! During a one hour presentation, there are six ad breaks with each break filled with roughly eight ad spots. With a total of 48 spots, in one hour RCTI scoops Rp. 864,000,000. Not only that, after a break of one hour, the result show phase … takes place from 10–11 p.m. Here, RCTI achieves almost the same ratings, which means takings of around Rp. 1,728 billion for one episode. And that's underestimating.
>
> (Guritno *et al.* 2004: 31)

During season two, the number of ad. spots rose to 17 advertisements on average per commercial break, but the advertisements were much shorter individually than those of season one. In a newsletter published in August 2004, the media research group AC Nielsen gave a report highlighting *Indonesian Idol*'s ratings success compared with its two main rivals, *AFI 3* and *KDI*. They found that during the commercial breaks of *AFI* 3, most viewers tuned into *Indonesian Idol*, and vice versa during the *Indonesian Idol* breaks. The introduction of *KDI* influenced viewer choice further, but more

people watched the final moments of *Indonesian Idol* than the other two programmes (Nielsen Media Research 2004: 6). Although it is questionable how Nielsen Media Research obtained their data, the fact that they published this account in a widely read and distributed industry newsletter is significant. In 2004, *Indonesian Idol* was the star of the ratings game (at least according to AC Nielsen, *Gatra*, and *Tempo*), and its advertising was presented as reaching the highest number of (target) consumers.

The Marketing Value of *Idola*

Ratings success for television programmes invariably means the stars become recognizable and have greater commodity value as signs. The *Idola* were, and are, also contracted by various companies to market their products. This is especially true for Delon, the runner-up of *Indonesian Idol* 1, whose *cakep* (handsome, trendy) looks made him a success with both fans and advertisers. The judges also became 'faces' for headache tablet Paramex and Mustika Ratu face-whitening lotions. Add this to the product placement throughout the show of sponsors' products and services and it is easy to see why some authors argue that reality television is 'advertainment': the merging of advertising and entertainment programming, which creates a new type of consumer culture (Berger 2003; Deery 2004).

For June Deery (2004), reality television's primary purpose is to sell. Sponsors become part of the show, central to the narrative, and not just a 'frame' before the extended commercial break. In *Indonesian Idol*, the *Idola* are often seen using Fren network cellular phones while eating Indomie instant noodles and wearing certain designer clothes. From Deery's perspective, every part of the programme is a commodity, especially the *Idola* themselves, and so the real story of the programme is to 'sell, sell, sell'. According to Aditya Indrawanto, an account executive for Matari Advertising who manages Fren and Indomie's advertising, product placement on *Indonesian Idol* has been a highly successful strategy for his clients. Product sales had increased since they began advertising on *Indonesian Idol*, especially amongst 'tier one' of the population. Indrawanto felt that the 'exclusive' and 'foreign' feel of *Indonesian Idol* attracted these tier one consumers to the show, and that this in turn had boosted his clients' sales considerably with the target group (Indrawanto, personal communication 2005). In many respects then, the real 'consumers' of *Indonesian Idol* are the advertisers themselves, whilst 'the audience' (as produced through ratings) constitute the product.

Highly surprising in terms of marketing and merchandizing though is that the merchandizing for *Indonesian Idol* is nowhere near as extensive as that of *American Idol*, *Australian Idol*, *Canadian Idol*, and other adaptations. The product list for these countries is extensive: single song releases, albums, posters, DVDs, books, t-shirts, temporary tattoos, key chains, karaoke machines, and a CD-ROM computer game are just a few of the items available to fans. In Jakarta, for instance, although there were *Indonesian Idol* albums available for

sale (both official and pirated) mid-2005, and t-shirts were produced on the black market for season one, there was very limited merchandizing available at the live Friday concerts for season two, and none available at regular shops and stalls other than the album releases. Compare this with *AFI* with its huge availability of merchandizing, and even an online store. In 2004, sellers found it extremely profitable to sell *AFI* trading cards, writing paper, wallets, pins, and key chains outside primary schools. These trading cards had specific street value and if an *Akademia* were to win the most SMS votes that week, their card's value would increase. *Indonesian Idol*, however, has no such merchandizing available. At the concerts, balloon-sellers told me that the producers were very strict about copyright and they were not allowed to copy the *Indonesian Idol* logo. Their balloons and signs were only permitted stencilled outlines of the names of contestants, which they made to order. Selling balloons for Rp. 10,000 each (roughly $1.40AUD), one seller told me they would make enough profit to be worthwhile, but he felt they could earn a lot more if they were allowed to use the *Idol* logo.

The Sign of the *Idola* Image

The *Idol* logo is a readily identifiable sign in global television and, by virtue of this, has great power both in terms of marketing value and in creation of meaning. It is doubtful that the balloon-sellers would have been able to purchase the rights to use the *Idol* sign and still make a profit at Rp. 10,000 per balloon. From a semiotic perspective, we find many signs throughout *Indonesian Idol*, not only the logo, all of which are part of the global *Idol* brand. The blue colour scheme, the theme music, the slogans, the stage, the editing style and camera angles, the 'nasty judge' and the 'nice judge', the lights and character montages: all of the elements that create the format are in themselves a sign system. This sign system is consistent across different countries' adaptations of the show, which makes the format clearly identifiable across cultures and locales.

In approaching the *Idola* from this same perspective, we gain a greater understanding of their commodity value as images or signs. Like the logo, the *Idola* image has value in both the market and cultural economies. As Marshall (1997: 57) relates:

> Like the sign, the celebrity represents something other than itself. The material reality of the celebrity sign that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation disappears into a cultural formation of meaning. Celebrity signs represent personalities more specifically, personalities that are given heightened cultural significance within the social world.

This perspective can be applied to analyses of the *Idola*. It is not the individual contestant on *Indonesian Idol* who has immediate exchange value, but rather the concept or idea of the *Idola* and what the *Idola* represents.

After all, anyone can be an *Idola* and, in the end, it does not matter who wins from the production companies' profit-making perspective. They do not even have to be good-looking, as proven by the very overweight Mike who won the season two competition, or follow the mainstream faith, as with Joy, the Christian gospel-singer winner of season one. The record companies are guaranteed a platinum, if not multi-platinum album, and the television producers have a well-rating show no matter who wins: the *Idola* are interchangeable.

The *Idola* as a Global Brand

When asked which show they thought was 'better' out of a choice of *Indonesian Idol* I, *Indonesian Idol* II, *AFI* and KDI, more than 80% of 150 survey respondents from universities and high schools in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali chose one of the *Idol* shows. Their reasons? It was like *American Idol*, it was better 'quality', and it did not just mimic a foreign show: it was the same as the foreign original.[2] No doubt the ability to compare *Indonesian Idol* and *American Idol*'s sign systems aided these conclusions, as *American Idol* was broadcast by RCTI immediately prior to *Indonesian Idol*'s seasons. Although *AFI* or KDI may have been respondents' favourite shows, *Indonesian Idol* was consistently regarded as better quality. Since *AFI* was in production long before *Indonesian Idol*, and in fact TransTV's *Popstars* preceded them both, why is it that *Indonesian Idol* was still regarded as 'the original' and 'the best' by respondents?

Many survey and interview participants were adamant that the global nature of *Indonesian Idol* distinguished it from the other reality television shows. The fact that the *Idola* would have the opportunity to 'go international' and participate in *World Idol* and *Asian Idol* was a recurring theme in survey responses about the quality of the show. Throughout both seasons, the global nature of the programme was constantly reiterated by the show's hosts, with many references to *World Idol* and past *Idola*'s success overseas. There were also crossovers between *Indonesian Idol* and other countries' versions: Clay Aiken, an American *Idol*, visited tsunami-stricken Aceh; Guy Sebastian, an Australian *Idol*, sang with some of Indonesia's season one *Idola*; and the winner of the Philippines *Idol*, Christian Bautista, performed at the *Indonesian Idol* 2 Grand Final. That the *Indonesian Idol* series one winner, Joy, quit her contract because of the producers' reluctance for her to 'go international' straight away caused an uproar of public opinion in the tabloid press and online bulletin boards. Many viewers wrote in these forums that they felt cheated that Joy did not have the opportunity to compete on *World Idol* in 2004, and that RCTI and FremantleMedia's management team were to blame. In season two, the producers were much more careful not to make promises about a second *World Idol*, but instead focused on *Asian Idol* to be held in late 2005. In any case, the global nature (in terms of both distribution and participation) of *Indonesian Idol* and

possibilities for the *Idola*'s success at the international level remained central to the show's promise of stardom.

Imperialistic *Idola*?

The idea of *Idola* as a global brand leads to questions of cultural and media imperialism. Indeed, the cultural imperialism thesis is initially a very attractive one for explaining the messages of *Indonesian Idol*. Herbert Schiller (1976) proposed the use of the term 'cultural imperialism' to describe and explain the way in which large multinational corporations, including the media, of developed countries dominate developing countries. For proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis, global television is colonizing television. In Indonesia, the idea of cultural influence from the West (mainly America) through the medium of television is not new, and has been a long-standing concern (Kitley 2000: 103). In *Indonesian Idol*'s case, the contents of the show are recognizably 'Western'. Not only did the format originate from the West, first in the UK and then America, but the *Idola* image is also of the West. That is, the portrayed 'globality' of what they represent is identifiably Western, and of Western culture.

Culture is understood here as widely distributed systems of symbols through which people make sense of the world in order to orient themselves, construct identities, and communicate with others (Peterson 2003). Media producers necessarily draw on these same symbolic systems in order for the representations they create to be meaningful for viewers. With *Indonesian Idol* there is a tendency for global culture to be equated with Western culture, and it is a one-way flow. For example, the *Idola* sing songs and engage in a performance style from the Western 'pop' and 'rock' traditions rather than from more uniquely 'Indonesian' forms such as *dangdut* or 'traditional' Indonesian music. This in turn makes *Indonesian Idol* familiar to foreign audiences and gives it a foreign, or at least international, feel for local audiences. The 'Indonesian' of *Indonesian Idol* is tokenistic: the *Idola* occasionally wear *pakaian adat* (traditional dress) on State visits, they have their own theme song, and there are many 'background information' scenes about the *Idola*s' home towns and support networks. However, these characteristics are part of the prescribed format, and are consistently adapted across every country's version of the show, and this is not something unique to the Indonesian case.

The Indonesian press has critiqued *Indonesian Idol* for valuing one style of cultural performance and celebrity over another, that is, the Western pop tradition over more recognizably 'Indonesian' types. *The Jakarta Post*, in particular, has been highly critical of *Indonesian Idol* and reality television's 'effect' on Indonesian mass culture. Although *The Jakarta Post* journalists were initially enthusiastic about the show and reported on its potential for invigorating the music industry, by the end of 2004, articles were much more negative in tone and expressed the opinion that many of the reality

television shows in production were having a detrimental effect on Indonesian culture. In September, a feature article stated,

> Entertainment or reality shows should not necessarily be banned. But anything which threatens to retard the country's intellectual development should be shelved. Otherwise our society will get dumber as our neighbours get smarter.
>
> (*Jakarta Post* 2004)

The label most often used in the mass media to express the idea that a society is experiencing a marked cultural decline, is 'dumbing down'.[3] Like many other labels employed to describe developments in the socio-cultural sphere, it is decidedly imprecise. Since the early 1990s, however, 'it has been applied to a wide range of artefacts and phenomena and has been frequently mobilized to indicate the user's disapproval that cultural life is being increasingly subject to commodifying and globalizing forces' (Kilborn 2003: 26). It is interesting that the journalist quoted above was wary of 'our neighbours get[ting] dumber' when all of Indonesia's closest neighbours (Malaysia, Singapore, Australia) have themselves imported the *Idol* format, and exchange *Idola* with Indonesia both in promotional exercises and via the music charts. Perhaps the journalist was following a more general trend of commentators overseas to classify reality television formats such as *Idol* as 'mindless entertainment' (Hill 2005). For these analysts, reality television has low 'cultural capital', to use sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's term, and therefore will have little value in the cultural marketplace. Then again, the reason the journalists were fearful is because, in Indonesia, these television shows have high cultural capital: they are representative of a global network of exchange and of participation in a global community: they have a 'global glamour' that is promoted and presented by producers and advertisers as being highly desirable.

The *Idol*ogy of *Indonesian Idol*

John Thompson (1984: 4) proposes that 'to study ideology, is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination'. Returning to the framework of cultural imperialism then, the West is dominating Indonesia with this import. In other words, the ideology of *Indonesian Idol* is an *Idol*ogy of global glamour and of capitalist consumption values, represented through the *Idola* image. The 'meaning' of *Indonesian Idol* and the *Idola* serve to sustain the relations of the West being the 'ideal' and participation in a global network of celebrity as being the ultimate accomplishment in the entertainment world. To 'go international', particularly to Western countries, is promoted as the ultimate desire. The ideology of *Indonesian Idol* represents something other than just a new pathway of *selebritas* status, and demonstrates the adaptation or change of

local cultures. From this perspective, *Indonesian Idol* is a direct example of cultural imperialism, and represents a one-way flow of values and ideas. The 'Indonesian' aspects of Indonesian Idol are a facade for a foreign cultural import.

However, the cultural imperialism thesis is not without its critics, and there are dangers in only considering this perspective. Some authors argue that the thesis overstates the power of the global as a straightforward extension of Western (particularly American) power, and understates local responses to the global. The situation is much more complicated because societies are not necessarily 'passive recipients' of whatever product, company, or media is thrust upon them. Critics and revisionists of the thesis assert that the economic component of media imperialism may be expressed in statistics, but the cultural component is more difficult to measure (see Sreberny-Mohammadi 2002). Furthermore, they argue, audiences are active producers of meaning and produce a diversity of readings. Therefore, the cultural imperialism thesis is a limited one for analysing the popularity and influence of *Indonesian Idol*. Although the format is highly prescriptive and it is not necessarily *Anda yang memilih* ('It's you who choose', the catchcry of season one), a centre periphery model that pits 'the West' against 'the Rest' is inadequate to explain the global flows of cultural technologies associated with *Indonesian Idol* and the *Idola*. Many writers on the subject argue that globalization does not necessarily mean cultural homogenization, and local audiences apply their own cultural competencies when taking meaning from, and adapting, foreign texts. Arjun Appadurai (1996), for instance, suggests that global trends intersect with local practices to create disjunctive local patterns of production and consumption. His key point is that simplistic centre periphery models are inadequate to explain the impact of globalizing cultural flows, which he summarizes as ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes that are ever-changing. From this perspective, *Indonesian Idol* is one landmark in a complex system of global messages, and one that is influenced by (and influences) a wide range of cultural texts, values, understandings, and ideologies. Although the format may have originated in the West, the local aspects of it remain critically important, and they are not tokenistic. It is those aspects that are appealing to viewers and fans, who interpret them in a variety of ways for their own purposes.

'Feeling Glocal' with *Indonesian Idol*

Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi (2002: 353) has identified the need for an alternative approach to globalization and media products, 'one that recognizes and does justice to the dynamic tension between the global and the local, and the shifting terrains they encompass'. She calls this outlook 'the global in the local, the local in the global', a very similar approach to Koichi Iwabuchi's (2004) description of 'feeling glocal', and lends another,

alternative, framework for approaching the production and consumption of *Indonesian Idol* and its *Idola*

In business jargon, 'glocal' means taking a global view of the market, but making adjustments for local considerations. Rather than implying the disappearance of the local through standardization the term highlights the linking of locales and the flow of ideas and technologies between them. As Iwabuchi (2004: 34) describes,

> ... the format business has given audiences a pleasure in sharing the common frameworks and the irreducibly different appearances that manifest in local consumption. Put differently, what is being promoted is not simply 'global localization' that aims to adopt the common to the difference but also 'local globalization' that makes audiences feel 'glocal', that is, a sense of participation in a global society through the reciprocated enjoyable recognition of local (in most cases, synonymous to 'national') specificities articulated through the shared formats.

Clearly, *Indonesian Idol* is an example of 'feeling glocal' because it is a local adaptation of a global product. If the winner of *Indonesian Idol* were to participate in *World Idol*, then there would also be an outward transfer, and the *Idola*'s songs have the potential to climb the music charts outside of Indonesia. Rather than diminishing or 'corrupting' local cultures then, foreign format imports such as *Indonesian Idol* offer another forum for the expression of local culture and celebrity within the paradigm of global television: it has not replaced any 'Indonesian' form, but has extended the field of possibilities. Before *Indonesian Idol* and other reality television programmes were broadcast in Indonesia, Western imports predominated in those timeslots. These were mainly direct, subtitled or dubbed, imports of films and dramas or sitcoms. They have now been replaced by local productions, albeit foreign formats, or as *Gatra* headlined, '*Program Impor, Idola Lokal*' ('Imported programme, local *Idola* ', 15 May 2004). Furthermore, fans of the show are not restricted to Indonesia alone, and are part of a global community. Participation in the *Idol* experience is a transnational experience: it is participation in a global community from a local level. It is glocal.

On the other hand, notions of global and local cultures, and of global and local celebrities, are relational. The local is often defined in opposition to the global and, in the cultural imperialism thesis, in opposition to the West. But, as we can see with *Indonesian Idol*, the distinction between the local and the global has become complicated and problematic. There are definite local aspects of the show, but these can also be interpreted as tokenistic and prescriptive: a mere 'ethnic tinge', reinforcing the hegemonic cultural order in which global, Western-based forms dominate. Are they really local, or are they global? Moran (1998) argues that formats are not the catalysts for

cultural sameness or the loss of cultural diversity; adaptations provide opportunities for re-imagining nations in various ways. Hence, *Indonesian Idol* provides opportunities for re-imagining celebrity, culture, and the nation in various ways, and this is not uniform. It is also not uniquely 'Indonesian'. This is a phenomenon shared by many locales, and not all of them 'Western'. From one perspective, *Indonesian Idol* is an example of cultural imperialism; from another, it is an example of cultural hybridity and pluralism. Others still see the re-invigoration of Indonesian pop music through *Indonesian Idol*, or it can be approached as an example of 'feeling glocal'. What analysis of these different perspectives reveals is an example of how producers are imagining Indonesia's position in the global cultural flow when they develop strategies of glocalization. At the very least, Indonesia is an active participant in this global flow, and the *Idola* are representative of a global phenomenon of a new type of television celebrity, and a new television audience.

*Idol*izing 'the Audience'

While the media construct the public visibility of the star (proposes them for election), it is the audience (as electors) who determine their degree of success (Holmes 2004b: 167). Rather than being commodities created by foreign production industries to sell other commodities, or part of the West's quest for global cultural homogeneity, the *Idola* signify a new trend in celebrity production and consumption: direct democratic election via an interactive process. The audience (and not the producers, the text, or the institutions) have the power in determining the outcome of this cultural product. Indeed, this is explicitly advertised by *Indonesian Idol* with the catchcry of '*Anda yang memilih, Anda yang menentukan*! ' (It's your choice, your decision!) at the beginning and end of every show. But is this just a *fantasi*? Just how interactive, and active, is this 'interactive audience', and how much power do they really have? To begin to answer these questions, let us first determine who 'the audience' actually are.

Philip Kitley (2000: 110), in his book on Indonesian television, describes RCTI's audience as being perceived as: 'a collection of well-off consumers who enjoy a materialistic lifestyle increasingly influenced by international styles and values'. It is clear from commentators' accounts, advertising on RCTI, and articles in the periodical press that *Indonesian Idol* is aimed at those middle to upper-class 'well-off consumers', especially teenagers, who live in the major cities of Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. The *dangdut* talent quests such as *KDI* and *KonDang-in* are aimed at a different population, as is *AFI* with its emphasis on regional districts rather than Jakarta that appeals to all ages. However, to make generalizations about *Indonesian Idol*'s audience as only those well-off teenage consumers is problematic and relies on many assumptions that treat individuals as a generalized group, or a 'mass' rather than 'active viewers' of varied tastes.

'Active viewing' is the notion of viewers engaging with television programmes, often through what Stuart Hall (1980) has described as the 'encoding/decoding' process. From this perspective, although texts are 'structured in dominance' leading to a 'preferred meaning', the audience may not necessarily understand the texts in the same way the creators intended, they may totally ignore the message in favour of just enjoying the image, or even read television broadcasts proactively in the political sense. They may also appear to take no notice at all of what they might be watching (Nilan 2001: 86). Anthropologists go one step further to argue that interpretation of television messages is a social act, a performance by particular persons in particular situations, and seek to understand the ways in which people encounter media texts in everyday life and how this shapes their reception of, and active engagement with, them (Peterson 2003). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the many theories of the audience here. But, in favouring an anthropological perspective, it is important to understand the viewing context of *Indonesian Idol*'s audience, and to identify that the assumption that 'the audience' are those 'ABG' (*Anak Baru Gede*, literally 'children newly big' or the 'yuppie' equivalent) and '*anak gaul*' ('trendy youth') is largely correct within this context.

The Viewing and Voting Context

The ABG viewers of *Indonesian Idol*, particularly in Jakarta, encounter this multimedia text in a saturated fashion in their everyday lives due to the impact of new media convergence. Understanding the sheer volume of advertising and media texts related to the show that are being accessed (actively and passively) is highly significant when approaching the audience of *Indonesian Idol*. In June of 2005 when the show was mid-season, numerous Jakarta and Surabaya shopping malls had signs urging fans to '*nonton bareng*' (watch together) in their cafes, mobile phone providers pushed downloading of *Indonesian Idol* ringtones, no teen magazine was without *Idol* gossip, and *Indonesian Idol* CDs had prime positions in music stores. These are just a few examples of what was available in addition to the relentless advertising on RCTI, most notably the *Indonesian Idol* logo in the top right-hand corner of the screen during every other show. The text itself was also multi-platform with its website and mobile phone components offering what Will Brooker (2001) calls 'media overflow': an immersive, participatory experience that extends the 'text' of the show beyond the time and space in which it is broadcast. It was difficult to be unaware of *Indonesian Idol*, especially if you were of that 'target audience' who shopped at the malls, owned a mobile phone, and read magazines and websites. Hence, the audience of *Indonesian Idol* had a very immersive environment in which to access this media text, and it is easy to assume this would have an impact on how they would respond to, and interact with, the show.

In my surveys of this 'target audience', however, I discovered that only a small proportion of respondents actively sought out supplementary

non-television media sources related to *Indonesian Idol*. Almost all had watched the show on television, chatted about *Indonesian Idol* with friends both face-to-face and via the phone, seen billboards and advertising, and heard songs on the radio. But less than 20 per cent of respondents had actively gone to internet cafes to seek out more information, bought tabloids specifically for *Indonesian Idol* coverage, or bought official merchandise. This was also reflected in SMS voting. As described earlier, an essential element of the show is the 'democratic' SMS and premium call voting. Contrary to popular advertising and newspaper reports of a 'frenzy of voting' and 'revenue raising', many viewers of *Indonesian Idol* surveyed did not actually participate in the voting process. Only nine respondents from a sample of 150 had actually ever voted, and only four with any regularity. From those 150 students, almost all had seen the show, and over 80 per cent were regular viewers. Many survey respondents wrote that they did not like the SMS and telephone polling system – they thought Indonesian people would vote with their hearts, and not their heads. In other words, they would choose 'the best' singer based on their background and looks rather than voice quality. Many also described their dislike of the reality show's timeslot. Considering it is at 10 p.m. on a Friday schoolnight, many felt cheated that they would not be able to watch the results, even if they did vote.

In contrast, from my surveys of 60 audience members at the live concerts for *Indonesian Idol*, a very different picture emerges. Seventy-three per cent of respondents reported that they regularly voted via SMS or telephone for their favourite *Idola*, some spending up to Rp. 500,000 (roughly AUD$70) a week on votes, with most averaging Rp. 10,000 to Rp. 50,000 (AUD$1.40 – $7). Their reasons for voting were just as the other respondents feared: many of the studio audience based their decisions on primordial ties with contestants, and then on 'voice quality' and 'friendliness'.

In the act of voting, we can see a definite distinction between viewers and fans of the show. Bielby, Harrington, and Bielby (1999) explain that the difference between a television viewer and a television fan is an important one. To 'view' television is to engage in a relatively private behaviour, but to be a 'fan' is to participate in a range of activities that extend beyond the private act of viewing and reflects an enhanced emotional involvement with a television narrative. Long-time fans, moreover, develop a 'metatext', consisting of a detailed knowledge of the history, themes, and running jokes associated with a television show and create a great deal of discourse about their own media consumption (Peterson 2003: 151). Therefore, being a fan of *Indonesian Idol* involves more than an affective orientation towards a 'distant other' and requires active engagement with media texts.

There was a great deal of difference in survey answers between declared fans at the show and randomly selected participants from the universities and schools, which verifies the descriptions of fandom above. The fans interacted and accessed many more supplementary materials than the

viewers, and actively sought out possibilities for that interaction. They bought CDs, participated in mailing lists, bought magazines and tabloids, visited internet cafes, attended Meet-n-Greets, made t-shirts and placards, and actively sought out like-minded fans. It is clear though, that the definitive fan action is participation in the voting process. This activity reflects both enhanced emotional and economic involvement with the *Idola* narrative and defines the 'ethnographic moment' in which viewers become fans. Overall, the fans were, and are, far more interactive in their activity than the viewers.

Strong *Indonesian Idol* fans are not 'passive viewers' subject to 'media effects', but engage in television viewing, and take action based on that engagement. Rather than the more traditional celebrity–fan relationship, whereby the fan 'is seen as being brought into (enthralled) existence by the modern celebrity system, via the mass media' (Jenson 1992: 9), the process is inverted. The *Idola* are understood to be a result of the fans – as a response to the ratings system, and to their voting. The fans' support is paramount for the creation of the *Idola*. This is why *Indonesian Idol* fans are almost always called '*pendukung*' rather than '*penggemar*' or even 'fan'. *Penggemar* is the Indonesian equivalent of the English term 'fan', from the Latin, 'fanaticus ', originally meaning 'of the temple', becoming a reference for certain excessive forms of religious belief and 'excessive enthusiasm' (Jenkins 1992: 12). *Pendukung*, however, translates as 'supporter'. Before the emergence of the *Idola*, '*pendukung*' predominantly described the supporters of sporting stars and groups, and of politicians and political parties. Their agency is seen as central to those peoples' success. And so it is with the *Idola*. Just as the talent quest reality shows have created a new genre of celebrity, there is now also a new genre of fan: the *pendukung*, the creators and supporters of *Idola*, and not a response to their creation. This is not to say that the *pendukung* have replaced the *penggemar*: rather the *penggemar* in this case more closely resemble the 'viewer' as described earlier whereas the *pendukung* are the more active, interactive 'fan' without whom the *Idola* would not exist.

Issues of Interactivity

As Tincknell and Raghuram (2004: 201) explain in their analysis of *Big Brother*, 'the idea of "interactive" media texts makes the idea of the active audience newly interesting because it suggests that such audiences may go beyond simply responding to a text – they may also help to change it'. Although the concept of 'interactivity' is ambiguous, it has gained increasing currency in relation to television, 'articulating a rhetoric that insists pressingly upon a "new" participatory relationship between viewer and screen' (Holmes 2004a: 213). This has prompted critics to re-examine the concept of the active audience that has been so central to debates in media and cultural studies. Some approach this in a positive light (the audience are participators and not just passive viewers), and others in a more negative one (it is a gimmick employed to grab viewer attention, nothing more). However, we must remember that this is not a new phenomenon,

even in Indonesia. Magazines have had confessional advice columns for years, the 1980s saw talent quests premiering on TVRI, and AnTeve's *Gol Gol Gol* in 1995 featured a machine that could fire footballs at high speed controlled by call-in viewers using their push-button telephone handset (Barkin 2001). Moreover, Indonesian audiences have a long history of direct interaction with other forms of media, especially performance texts such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) plays and dance presentations, from entering into dialogue with characters to performing themselves. It can be argued that Indonesian audiences have always interacted with media texts, and the idea that reality television in its participatory style is something entirely new is misleading.

What is new with *Indonesian Idol* is that the interactivity between audience and text is explicit, and the idea of agency is central to its success. This begs the question: to what extent is it a *fantasi* of agency that is constructed 'from above'? Holmes (2004a) suggests that understanding the extent to which such programmes offer a space for audience intervention in, and negotiation with, contemporary cultural production requires a resistant reading that dismantles the rhetorical structures of the text itself. She argues that it is a naive view of the audience to think they have control, because their intervention in reality programmes is carefully orchestrated, managed, and curtailed (Holmes 2004b: 165). After all, they are told when to vote, why to vote, and how to vote. This is certainly evident in *Indonesian Idol*'s voting system where the *pendukung* have to take it on face value that the voting system is not corrupt: at no time is voting data revealed. Additionally, the voting process itself is highly regulated in being restricted to the various confines of the programme's format. It is not until the second phase of the show that viewers and fans have an opportunity for direct interaction, and even then it is restricted to a specific timeframe and socio-economic group. During the entire process then, the *pendukung* are at best choosers rather than actors, and their activity is always prescribed. But this does not mean the audience are powerless. As choosers, they determine the degree of success of the *Idola* who have been constructed by the media, and in this way their interactivity via the voting system has a direct effect on the show's outcome. In *Indonesian Idol*, moreover, the audience is presented with (carefully constructed) opportunities for resistance, and the election of what some consider non-mainstream choices, such as Mike and Joy, might be considered as such. In this way, the *Indonesian Idol* text becomes a site of negotiation, or struggle, between encoded messages and the decoding process: between the messages 'from above', and 'from below', and between the imaginings of the media professionals, and that of the audience.

Conclusion

The imagining presented in *Indonesian Idol* is one that is certainly popular, but whether as an aspirational imagining of the middle and upper-classes or a source of bemusement is open for debate. There is a 'global glamour'

about the programme and its stars: there is no doubt that the *Idola* image as an interchangeable commodity sign has great value in both the economic and culture industries. If we view the *Idola* 'from above' as commodities traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries, then the show's primary role is to extend and reinforce the role of capital, and of Western ideology. The *Idola* identity being created by, and in, *Indonesian Idol* represents certain perceptions of the social world, and certain cultural understandings. The fact that this form of celebrity and celebrity process originates from the West, and is created by an identifiably 'Western' format, is highly significant. However, from another perspective, *Indonesian Idol* is an example of cultural hybridity and pluralism in 'feeling glocal'. The social function of the *Idola* image is one of bridging the local and the global, and demonstrates Indonesia's participation in global television flows. The possibilities afforded by the programme for the *Idola* to 'go international' are considered vitally important by fans and *Idola* alike, and the fact that these wannabe celebrities depend upon a democratic election is central to the format. The audience, especially the *pendukung*, could possibly be described as 'active choosers'. The audience imagines it determines the degree of their *Idola*'s success, and their support is paramount for not only their favourite contestant's potential fame and fortune, but also the continued viability of the show. *Indonesian Idol* makes the celebrity process explicit, and audience agency always features within this process, even if it is prescribed.

I argue that *Indonesian Idol* is not an example of the local or the global, the East or the West, the producer or consumer, the audience or celebrity; but something else again. We need to resist the binary logic that seeks to comprehend cultural products via mutually exclusive terms, and recognize the emergence of a shared space. *Indonesian Idol* is representative of an understanding of celebrity that circulates globally, and the fact that so many audiences (especially teenagers) relate to the franchise so well all over the world is indicative of this. This understanding goes beyond 'glocalization', and represents new expectations of the viewer–screen relationship and of global cultural products. It may be a certain type of world culture, heavily commercialized, and quite exclusive, but it is glamorous and attractive because of this, at least for the Indonesian audience surveyed. Perhaps the global fame of *Indonesian Idol* is only a promise and not a fact, but it certainly captures the imagination, and the SMS votes.

Notes

1 The Indonesian press made many correlations between the voting systems on reality television programmes and Indonesian democracy during the lead-up to the 2004 Presidential elections. For an analysis of this and other links between performers and politicians in Indonesia, see Lindsay (2005).

2 This survey questionnaire was undertaken over three weeks in June of 2005 with 90 first-year students from Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta; Universitas Gajah Mada, Yogyakarta; and Universitas Udayana, Denpasar; and 60 final-year high

school students at SMUN8, Jakarta and SMA3, Yogyakarta. Their responses were contrasted with 60 surveys distributed to similarly-aged audience members at two 'live' *Indonesian Idol* tapings. Respondents were asked a series of open- and closed-answer questions concerning viewing habits, opinions on reality television in general, and talent quest programmes and *Indonesian Idol* in particular. Although the sample space was small, their responses gave anecdotal evidence that proved an interesting point of contrast to advertisers', fanzine, and producers' accounts.

3 Interestingly, in Indonesian-language newspapers and periodicals, the phrase 'dumbing down' is often borrowed directly from English. Colloquially, in relation to television, the concept is also expressed through the saying '*kebanyakan nonton televisi bikin otak mandul*' ('too much television makes one's brain barren').

7 Consuming gossip

A Re-domestication of Indonesian women

Vissia Ita Yulianto

Since its rebirth in the 1960s, the women's movement has singled out advertising as one of society's most disturbing cultural products (Zoonen 1994; Dines and Humez 2003). This is generally because people have less and less time to take anything seriously and commercial pressures feed into that. Another disturbing aspect of mass cultural media products is the popularity of soap operas (Scodari 2003), as illustrated in the case of Indonesia. But since 2000, celebrity news shows, popularly known as 'infotainment' in Indonesia, have surpassed advertisements and also soap operas as the most influential, and for some, disturbing media product in Indonesia. This new genre of female-oriented television shows have restricted women's role in Indonesian society. As a form of mass culture entertainment, this new genre of television product provides a point of entry for an analysis of Indonesian social and cultural dynamics. This chapter is not a comprehensive study. Its modest aim is to demonstrate the range of discourses and practices in which the 'infotainment' industry has meaning, particularly in relation to women.

What is Indonesian Infotainment?

Focusing on domestic topics, infotainment has become the second generation of Indonesian soap operas. Infotainment programmes are linked to soap operas in terms of the character, production, audience, and impact. The two cultural forms also have similar elements to a talk show. 'Infotainment' is marketed as being a mix of 'information' and 'entertainment'. The general understanding of infotainment is that it is a kind of 'light news', referring to a general type of news media broadcast programme, which either provides a combination of current affairs and entertainment programming, or an entertainment programme structured in news format (Wikipedia 2006). Indonesian infotainment, however, has its own format. It is not a Western-derived model like soap operas or games shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, where the actual programme is modified differently in various countries. Nor, is it like the Oprah Winfrey show (Moorti 2003), or Paris Hilton's reality show, *Simple Life*, despite their

common focus on 'female' topics. In fact, it is similar to the *MSNBC* website, but is formatted to be audio-visualized. In infotainment in Indonesia the 'gossip' content has become the major mode of mediation in what Williamson calls 'feminine spheres' (Williamson 1986). The format of infotainment sends an elementary sense of 'low culture' as the producers of infotainment shows promote and patronize far and wide, and audiences are driven to seek temporary celebrity news.

Celebrity shows have been subject to a series of debates and criticism. Local scholars have also debated the term infotainment itself. Arifin, for instance, suggests that the meaning of the word 'infotainment' should be narrowed to refer only to gossip shows because, currently, infotainment can include criminal news, general news, mystical news, and reality shows (Arifin 2005). Dalimunte, on the other hand, supports a broader concept of gossip shows to include portrayal of everyday life with all its complexity, and producers only package this as a commodity (Dalimunte 2002). He argues that this exposes the 'real' domestic and familial details of artists' lives. Unlike 'reality shows' such as *Big Brother* that fictionalize 'real life', 'infotainment' is not fictional, but reality – or documentary – presented purely for its apparent entertainment value.

In many parts of the world, the most popular fiction on television is usually soap operas (Rogers 2003). By contrast, in developing countries such as Indonesia, reality shows – which are *not* fictional shows – are the most popular television programmes. These shows take the form of the celebrity gossip show. The format of these shows usually consists primarily of accounts of a celebrity's love life, divorce, lifestyle, daily activity, sexual abuse, hobbies, and conflicts with other celebrities and so on. These issues are simultaneously related to the world of commodities. Recently, Usi Susilowati, one of the top three infotainment presenters in Indonesia, decided to resign from her job as the host of *Kabar-kabari* (RCTI). Indonesia's national daily, *Kompas*, reported that her decision was based on 'personal reasons'. However, soon afterwards she revealed what many had expected, admitting that she resigned from the popular show as soon as she became aware that this industry often produced false stories. Usually, this kind of show is anchored by one or two hosts. Some of the hosts clearly address a female audience. An example of this kind of programme is *Cek & Ricek*. In its 30 minute programmes, it presents four or five different gossip segments which last for two to four minutes each, the rest of the show being filled with commercial breaks. The following is an example of how a typical celebrity gossip 'news story' is presented:

> Mayang Sari makes more sensational news. After her 'half naked' photographs with Bambang Triatmojo, the first son of the former president Soeharto, appear on the internet, she decided to end her silence and confessed publicly that she is now happy with her 7 month pregnancy. When *Cek & Ricek* attempted to confirm the identity of the

> baby's parents, she gave no comment as she remains tight lipped when asked about her marital status.
>
> (*Cek & Ricek* 26 March 2006)

At this point, after a brief storyline by the host, the show continued with an audio-visual presentation of more gossip (or news), for three to four minutes. The quotation, as well as the audio-visual presentation of a story, is usually left unfinished. Later, the narrative will be continued, showing another episode of the gossip item, as seen below:

> Things are becoming clear. Mayang Sari gave birth to her baby in Pertamina Hospital [Jakarta] last night. She looked so happy and contented with her baby girl, Kirania Siti Triatmojo. The baby's name now tells us that the father of her baby is Bambang Triatmojo, the first son of the leader of the New Order Regime who has a wife and two children with his first marriage.
>
> (*Cek & Ricek* 21 April 2006)

Very often, the plot of a celebrity gossip show is similar to that of soap operas, in that both tend to form a continuing narrative taking the form of a serial, and the ending is often the most exciting part of the show. In order to avoid narrative closure, dramatic tension remains unresolved. As the gossip content of the show comes from real people, its outcomes are unpredictable. Repentance usually feeds the programmes, while viewers are asked to watch the same programme in the next show:

> Halimah Bambang Triatmojo, Gendhis and Panji became the suspects in the attack at the Mayang Sari house last night. They became angry with Bambang for his openness about his relationship with Mayang in public. Those three were furious with Mayang who became *de facto* mistress of Halimah's husband.
>
> (*Go Spot* 29 May 2006)

These quotations are typical of a wider trend of how celebrity gossip shows present 'information'. Apart from this serial style, the celebrity gossip shows more often present a closed-minded narrative. Their staple menu includes 'info' about an artist who is embroiled in a family conflict, another artist who has arrived from her honeymoon in Bali, and a singer who is about to get a divorce. Thus, celebrity gossip shows in Indonesia today have their own model and are clearly Jakarta-based.

The Mediascape of Infotainment

Some observers (for instance Shields as cited in Livingstone and Lunt 1994) would argue that television is part of popular or 'low' culture, and cheap

daytime programmes are its 'lowest' form. At the same time, it is often noted that television is becoming increasingly 'feminized' with the growing popularity of soap operas, talk shows, and game shows (Fiske 2001). The introduction of the celebrity gossip show industry needs to be understood in the context of the unstable condition of the Indonesian television industry in the 1990s. In response to the near demise of the Indonesian film industry in 1994, and to the success of the *Festival Sinetron* (Indonesian television soapies festival), the celebrity gossip show industry started to flourish in 1997. This genre developed from an idea from Ilham Bintang, who previously worked as a journalist. He was inspired by the success of his programme *Buletin Sinetron* (*BS*, Soap Opera Bulletin). The *Buletin* supported the *Festival Sinetron* (Indonesian Soap Opera Festival), and was meant to provide space for artists to speak about anything that interested them, a space which was not available for them before the existence of the soap opera bulletin.

Being aware of the potential public interest, Bintang with his production house, PT Bintang Advis Multimedia, launched *Cek & Ricek*, the first celebrity gossip show in the Indonesian television industry, which was aired on RCTI channel (Bintang 2002). In his accounts of its history, Bintang notes that many print journalists including Firman Bintang, Remy Sutansyah, Gandung Bondowoso, Syaiful Bayan, Dimas Supriyanto, Amazon, Dalimunte, and Zoel Fauzi Lubis had decided to turn to the celebrity gossip show business using audio-visual media. For these print journalists, producing celebrity gossip shows was like having 'a new toy' (*mainan baru*). Since then, the number of such programmes has increased; celebrity gossip shows are one of television's largest and fastest growing industries in Indonesia.

Television programmes are commodities, produced and distributed industrially with profitability as an operational imperative. Within this industry, success breeds imitators as each competitor seeks to replicate previous successes (Casey 2002). Success is also based on indicators of audience appreciation, enjoyment, and interest in programmes. All 13 Indonesian television stations air celebrity shows, and young girls, university students, housewives, maids, workers, and career women alike can become obsessed with them. Many are 'chain' television watchers – that is people who watch television from 7 a.m. to 8.30 p.m.

At the time of writing (2006), there are more than 30 separate infotainment programmes. SCTV, for instance, has seven celebrity gossip shows. These celebrity shows are spread through the day from Monday to Sunday providing 'hot gossip' about Indonesian public figures (see Appendix for a breakdown of the broadcasting of infotainment shows on an hourly and daily basis by television stations in 2005).

As mentioned earlier, the first infotainment show was *Cek & Ricek*. This show has been broadcast on RCTI for over seven years. It has consistently maintained high ratings and has proved to be successful commercially, and runs four or six commercials in each commercial break. Over the years, it has attracted other television stations to follow its success, by showing

programmes such as: *KISS* (*Kisah Seputar Selebritis*), *Kabar-Kabari*, *Kabar-Kabari Sensasi*, *Betis* (*Berita Selebritis*), *Otista* (*Obrolan Selebritis Kita*), *Silet*, *Insert* (*Informasi Selebritis*), *Ceriwis*, *Go Show*, *Go Spot*, *Dorce-Show*, *Hot Spot*, *Sindanglaia*, *Halo Selebriti*, *Gosip Apa Gosip*, *Kasak-Kusuk*, *Kasak-Kusuk Investigasi*, *In Dang-Dut*, *Cross-Check*, *SMS*, *Kiss Plus*, *Insert Pagi*, *Selebriti & Kriminal*, *Was-Was*, and many more.

The success of those television programmes has had a significant impact on other television programmes in Indonesia. Imitation has prevailed. As soon as one station succeeds with a particular programme, other channels follow, as has been the case with the celebrity gossip discussed above. Although there are currently more than 13 different television stations, the contents of their shows are very much alike.

For these reasons we must re-examine the observation as put forward by Williamson (1986: 100), arguing that the term 'mass culture' refers not so much to the artefacts themselves, the television programmes and so on, but the people who watch them, 'the masses'. As shown above, in the world of Indonesia's infotainment, it is people in the media industries that matter; the television programmers and the infotainment producers are primarily responsible for the overwhelming imitation and repetition. As a result, the number of infotainment programmes as well as their share of programming expanded at the expense of other and somewhat better-respected programmes. In part, this is because a single production house produces two or three different celebrity gossip shows based on the same material.

This business has been running well over the last seven years. According to Fairclough (1995), this is because television documentaries can be stored indefinitely, infinitely reproduced, and used and re-used for a variety of purposes at different times and places. They can be produced, distributed, and consumed as a cultural commodity. Compared with soap operas, there is now an excess of celebrity gossip shows.

Soap opera audiences usually have to follow a fixed schedule to watch the show, although VCR/television guides have been used as timetables for the weeks recording, thus mitigating the pressure of being dictated to by the schedule of leisure (Hayward 2003). Infotainment viewers have other recourse to avoid similar pressure. They need not worry about missing a day's gossip show, as the material will always be available somewhere sometime, as most gossip programmes present more or less the same material over and over again on different channels. As soap operas aim at women at home (Dines 2003), so too do gossip shows. But if VCR technology has freed women from always having to be at home to watch their favourite soap, the large number of similarly programmed celebrity gossip shows has equally helped female viewers – especially working viewers – to have constant access to the pleasure derived from them.

To keep women – as the primary audience – watching, these shows always end their programmes with a quiz to entice their audience with several hundred-thousand Rupiah (US$25–US$50). In order to be able to answer the

question, viewers have to watch that programme from the beginning to end, and in real-time. As gossip shows are in themselves of low intellectual content, the question is always of the kind that does not require any critical thinking.

Celebrity gossip shows also appear to be a daily subject of conversation. They have become a 'people's spectacle', referred to as *tontonan masyarakat* in Indonesia. Infotainment viewing has become a common leisure activity for many university students outside their college hours. In Yogyakarta – an Indonesian city famous for its education institutions, and for being the temporary home of thousands of students from all over Indonesia – almost every university female student possesses at least one television set in their boarding house. Based on my ethnographic research in the Yogyakarta suburb of Mrican in 2004, many of the 20 female student respondents turned on their television in the very early morning either to learn the latest gossip or just to kill time before going to university. Knowing the latest hot gossip seemed obligatory for them. Like thousands of other young girls, they have been 'addicted' to infotainment for over seven years.

A strong interest from the public is more prevalent in Indonesia's capital, as I found from a small sample survey I undertook in Jakarta between 2004 and 2005. Lidia, a product manager of a pharmacy company in central Jakarta, enjoys her lunch break as an escape from her routine work. While waiting for her lunch at a food stall close to her office, Lidia regularly enjoys a gossip show on television. Ibu Jamilah, the stall-owner who prepares the food, tunes into this programme for two reasons: she likes it herself, and she knows that everybody else enjoys gossip shows, such as her customer Lidia. The two regularly converse about the gossip show while watching and seem to gain pleasure from the show.

The entertainment industry does not exist to transmit information. Its purpose is to engage the audience emotionally, but, in so-doing, the ideas that it does transmit may be more deeply learned and retained (Jackson 2002). One important finding from my discussions with female viewers is that, when asked if celebrity gossip shows contain messages, they remark that it gives them information about celebrities. They consider 'gossip' to be 'information'. This may be because they felt the need to rationalize their addiction to gossip, and to legitimatize it by referring to it as a source of 'information'. When I asked whether more serious topics such as political questions should be discussed, most of them rejected the idea or at least showed some disagreement: 'Hey, why not just gossiping? What good is talking about politics? It just gives me a headache, you know!', said one of the female students, while another one said, 'I don't know anything about politics. It's confusing'.

Tabloidization

Celebrity gossip shows have succeeded in maintaining high ratings over a long period of time. Their viewers' compulsion to watch has directly impacted on the expansion of this business. The growth of this industry can

also be gauged from the variety of other businesses they run. The visual medium has also created another form of commodified culture. A certain number of tabloid newspapers serve celebrity news such as: *Cek & Ricek*, *Bintang*, *Nova*, *Star*, *Wanita Indonesia*, *Aura*, *Genie*, and hundreds more. The Bintang Group is an infotainment factory that publishes a wide range of titles from tabloids to television programmes on more than five television stations. The tabloid has market leadership with sales of around 150,000 to 400,000 per week, whereas its initial sales were less than 100,000 in 1997.

Farid Ridwan, the chief editor of *Cek & Ricek* said that the issues – hot gossip – determine how many copies they will print. In 1999, the death of popular celebrity, Nitatilana, gave them a good cover score to print 600,000 copies within a week. Until today, the minimum sales standard remains high, at roughly 150,000 per week (personal communication, Jakarta 2007). In tabloids, we usually see the quarter-page print ad. for infotainment programmes. Then, in television programmes, the tabloids are advertised in the form of pop-up templates that occur at the same time as the ad-libbing by the host. The success of this business reached a peak in June–July 2003, when it claimed to have captured more than a million readers and, thus, a huge income.

The profit-oriented drive of the celebrity gossip show industry can also be seen from the following example. Particularly popular in 2006 was *SMS Selebrities*. The producers of this media product (television) worked together with the Sony Eriksson Z5201. Here the audience was invited to send text messages to a designated number, coded for their favourite artist. As one of Jakarta's leading feminists has argued, infotainment is all about commodification. In other words, it is all about business (Budianta 2005).

Active Versus Passive Viewers

Television viewing is the site of an enormous amount of cultural work on the part of both the producers and receivers. And, even though the cultural power of institutions is deeply embedded in texts, and the writer–reader relationship is unequal, there is still room for movement and some degree of freedom (Kembrew 2001). The rest of this chapter will illustrate the often contradictory nature of the issue. On the one hand, television viewing has some potential for certain consciousness-raising purposes. On the other hand, it is seriously mistaken to overlook or underestimate the unintended or undesirable impact of addiction to television gossiping as shown below.

There has long been some controversy as to whose interest infotainment actually serves. While the dominant ideology of such programmes is decidedly patriarchal, it can be argued that the potential for women's empowerment certainly exists. The 'mediation' value of such programmes has been recognized by UNICEF. One UNICEF delegation visited the *Cek & Ricek* production house with the aim of spreading UNICEF's campaign against

the polio virus in Indonesia to women via their celebrity gossip shows programmes in August 2005.

Likewise, Baby Jim Aditya (2005), an activist for AIDS prevention and against domestic violence (*Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga* or *KRDT*), asked infotainments producers to popularize *KRDT* law (legalized 22 September 2004) through infotainment. As these messages are broadcast again and again, this may help women to become aware of domestic violence. At the same time, he also criticized infotainment programmes due to their lack of educational material in packaging news of violence in the household of artists.

This form of media has also been used by women activists such as Rieke Dyah Pitaloka to provide assistance to victims of domestic violence. One example is the case of Ivy, a celebrity who was badly beaten by her husband. With the assistance of activists she reported her case to the police, despite the fact that reporting domestic problems to police is rare in Indonesia. In fact, many Indonesians consider such action to be taboo as they expect women to remain silent even if they experience that kind of cruelty. But, through this media, female activists can tell women in general to take a stand against violence in the home.

In late January 2006, I saw a similar incident in my own village, Gemolong, Sragen (Central Java). A senior high school teacher reported her husband to the police because he had severely beaten her. People in the community were surprised that she had reported him. People said that this must have been because she watched too many infotainment programmes. Three days later when a neighbour visited her, she said that she just wanted to teach her husband a lesson so that he would never beat her again. What I want to emphasize here is that there is a way for celebrity gossip shows to empower women. As viewers, they can take certain values from the show; and be active in defending their interests.

As with Silverstone's study of television culture, Fiske also argues that fans are extremely creative and active. He points out that the notion of a productive audience does not necessarily provide the basis for a movement that can change society; instead he conceptualizes resistance as producing a form of counter-consciousness. But, even in the act of listening or watching a mass-media presentation, fans are engaged in constant symbolic meaning formation. Audiences also talk about music or television shows with others, creating shared and constantly metaphorizing communal meanings. Finally, fans engage in productive behaviour when they create fanzines, videos, songs, and other cultural products that are shared within their community (Fiske 2001).

However, the understanding of active and passive viewers can be subjective, and to some extent it depends on individual cases, and the perspective of the beholders. A feminist reading of celebrity gossip shows is likely to be critical of the conclusion that celebrity gossip show viewers are active. Especially in the case of celebrity gossip shows, there is no fetishization as in music or television shows such as in *Friends* or *American Idol* where the

relation between celebrities and audiences is direct, to the point of being an obsession. The connection is unlike the relationship between audiences and celebrities in celebrity gossip shows, but is still one of consumption. In contrast, celebrity gossip shows invented viewers who are not fans but, instead, a kind of voyeur. Even though audiences actively chat about the gossip from infotainment programmes, about artists and their problems and public behaviour, and buy and read tabloid newspapers, they remain only consumers and receivers of the broadcast messages. They do not truly constitute *active* viewers. The audiences do not actually do anything; they only stay as the passive target of these television messages and as victims of the television industry.

Although sometimes the shows present a life that looks better than that in which people find themselves, the vast majority of the audience still find such shows intriguing, and perhaps inspiring. It is my impression, however, that the overall tendency of the audience is to adopt the less desirable values from these mainstream shows. As suggested above, this tendency is further reinforced by the imposition of role models in the celebrity gossip shows and tabloids. It is never easy to expect and find viewers who are consciously active and creative.

Why Do Women Like Celebrity Gossip Shows?

The preceding sections show that many women in Indonesia spend a great deal of time watching television. It is hard not to assume that any type of television programme will ultimately have a profound and enduring impact on the audience, regardless of its timeslot. It is fair to hypothesize that the content of such programmes will slowly but surely be internalized, and will play a major role in shaping what the audience sees as common sense.

One would hope infotainment is available merely as an option for leisure. Unfortunately, this is not the case worldwide. It appears that gossip show viewing has become a dominant activity for the majority of women. Indonesian female university students spend an average of 8 to 10 hours a day watching gossip shows. In one sense, female audiences are responsible for what they see on television and whatever impact such choice might have on them. If they do not like gossip show programmes, at least – theoretically – they can change the channel. If this had been their choice, the programmes might not have enjoyed the high ratings they did. Seen from such a perspective, the widespread gossip shows reflect their choice, their views, and their taste. But the matter is more complicated than this. Women are also always in the position to freely choose what they see on television. In any case, in Indonesia we have not seen any strong rejection of the gossip show programmes. One wonders why this should be the case.

For many years in Indonesia, there was the widespread assumption that women like gossip shows because of their lack of intellectual reading or their lack of critical training. Women, especially among the middle-classes

are perceived to have the tendency to accept everything presented to them, rather than questioning and asserting their own choices. They are perceived to stay passive rather than being active agents. They are believed to prefer listening to 'gossip' rather than looking for facts. As far as any of such degrading perceptions has any truth, women can be seen as victims of the televised gossip shows, being made addicted to spending their time watching these shows. It becomes the fulfilment of their contemporary needs. It might be said that their supposed lack of critical thinking makes it easier for them to be receptive to the infotainment programmes and the advertisements that promote related commodities. As such, the television industry has re-domesticated women in contemporary Indonesia. The remaining section will elaborate this point.

As suggested earlier, there has been another and opposing interpretation; one that does not put the blame on the women, as women are not entirely free agents to choose what they consume. This more sympathetic perspective requires us to consider broader issues and contexts, within which women and men are subjected to a host of social forces. My recent observations in Jakarta suggest that chatting about gossip shows is not the exclusive activity of urban middle-class women. Men from the same class and location also enjoy this activity. From 2006, having male infotainment presenters has been a trend for many television networks. In the canteen, in the office while having a lunch break, or in the guardhouse, men can passionately jump from talking about one celebrity's life to another. This runs counter to the myth that only women like gossip shows. In response to my questions, some of these men explained that they need to be acquainted with the popular infotainment programmes of the day to build and maintain their social network. While university students in Yogyakarta use gossip shows for companionship on campus, and women use them in offices or in their neighbourhood, some of these men assume that women only waste their time with gossip shows for unhealthy companionship. But the same can be found among Jakartan men and women alike.

The general preoccupation with gossip shows may also have to do with the fact that the Indonesian audience lacks alternative options of quality programmes on television. The recent media liberalization has intensified competition to the extent that sensational news has filled airtime. Even some journalists who prepared critical investigation of matters that *are* of public concern do not live up to the expectation of their audience. Major problems that plague the nation have only received superficial analyses. Investigation of major corruption cases, for instance, does not go very far. Over time, people lose hope, become apathetic and choose to turn to entertainment programmes such as gossip shows instead. Under such conditions, the success of a celebrity gossip show requires the public's support, and those programmes that offer the instant pleasure of escapism constitute the most widely distributed form of popular culture in Indonesia.

Another contributing factor to the situation outlined above, which led to the supremacy of celebrity gossip shows, is the country's continued economic difficulties. The phenomenon is inseparable from the micro- and macro-level economic problems in Indonesia. These include the continuing rapid population growth, the alarming level of unemployment which increased from about 4.2,000,000 in 1997 to 11.4,000,000 in 2003 (Aloewie 2004) and 40,000,000 in 2006. Feeling so helpless in such dire conditions, and unable to cope with the increased costs of living, many Indonesians have also been frustrated by the uncontrollable widespread corruption at all levels, not to mention the issues of regional separatism and terrorism. Infotainment presents itself at such a moment. It both fills an emotional gap among many in Indonesia and expresses the impoverished conditions of social and economic life of the nation.

As suggested earlier, the low cost is the main drive for the producers of celebrity gossip shows. Ishadi SK, the director of TVRI (the state-owned and first television station in Indonesia) who now successfully runs Trans-TV, supports this view. His television station produces programmes that are popular but cheap, such as gossip shows or reality shows (personal communication, Jakarta 2005). A local film production costs between Rp. 350,000,000 and Rp. 500,000,000 (US$ 3,500 to $5,000), while the cost of celebrity gossip shows is less than Rp. 60,000,000 (US $ 600). Apart from the low cost, it is very easy to make celebrity gossip shows. One only needs a camera and a reporter, and to sell the product to a television station (Dalimunte 2002). It is also no secret (at least among Jakartans) that many infotainment journalists have not had any formal training in journalism. Almost anyone with good connection to the media industry can become an infotainment journalist. Therefore, quite often the information disseminated by these programmes falls short of professional standards. According to Arivia, the 'information' is 'food without any nutrition' (Arivia 2005). Such a view conforms with the broader conception cited in the opening section of this chapter, that television is part of popular or 'low' culture, and that cheap daytime programmes are the 'lowest' form (Shields 1991).

Celebrity Gossip Shows and Re-domestication

Gossip shows raise a serious issue among the advocates of Indonesian feminists. Gadis Arivia, co-founder and former editor of *Jurnal Perempuan* (Woman's Journal) and one of Jakarta's leading feminists, has no respect for such shows. She says that the one and only orientation of the very many infotainments is capital. Running this business is very easy and cheap. It does not require conducting research or use of the critical mind. Infotainment businesses just sell gossip and conflict: the more gossip and the more severe the conflicts reported, the higher the ratings or magazine sales are.

Arivia stresses that because the orientation of these infotainment programmes is entertainment, which can make a profit by creating cheap entertainment, the quality of the information presented in such shows barely has any relevance. These programmes are not intended to increase the quality of public understanding of current affairs and issues of importance to the public. Rather these programmes 'deceive' society, in particular women (Arivia 2005). She adds that the infotainment that flows into the presentation of gossip and conflicts is framed within a logic of 'black-versus-black dichotomy'.

In my view, celebrity gossip shows become a kind of 'air pollution' that the female audience consumes every day. Gossip shows promote and reinforce some of the most conservative domestic values that exist in Indonesian society. As demonstrated in the previous sections, female viewers become the primary, if not exclusive, targets of these commercialized shows. The shows, which offer a continuous format of problems with a familial and gender bias, have dissuaded and distracted women from participation in public life of major importance. They also reinforce and often legitimize gender inequality as something natural and inevitable. The daytime presence of celebrity gossip shows affects many Indonesian women's sense of reality.

The domestication of women's roles has a long history, highlighted by three periods: the later years of Dutch colonialism, the persistence of traditional Islamic values (see Dzuhayatin 2001), and the period of modernization during the 32-year rule of the New Order (Yulianto 2006b). Each, in different ways, has strengthened the hegemony of patriarchy. Feudalism and colonialism were very powerful structures that silenced women. Prior to independence, Indonesian women were almost totally absent from public affairs and until now have been 'written out of history'. More recent history revisions have rediscovered the role of women in the past, and rebuked the previous denials of the significance of women's involvement in the nationalist movement.

Sukarno, in both his personal and political positions, encouraged women to come out of the domestic domain and take active roles in public spheres. He was intensely interested in issues of women's role in society, and saw the potential power of women as pillars toward nation-building. Because of this, he supported the women's movement, attended women's congresses, gave educational training to women and, of primary importance, appointed women to his cabinet. But not all agree with Sukarno's earlier vision of the role of women in Indonesian society. According to Arivia (2005), Sukarno only used women to support his political struggle for independence. Arivia may be correct, but that is politics. What remains is that Sukarno contributed to what has been one of the key agendas of feminism: gender equality. His political motives aside, Sukarno helped to empower women and helped to enhance the long struggle for gender equality (Yulianto 2006a). In this light, during Sukarno's presidency, women's inclusion in public affairs, including state politics, was already the accepted norm. What followed the end of Sukarno's presidency was a setback.

After Sukarno's so-called era of 'Guided Democracy', Suharto's New Order government legally restricted women from involvement in the public domain and returned them to domestic roles. Wierengga (as cited in *Stri* 2002) has shown that one of the earliest measures of the New Order in establishing its state power was to ban Gerwani – the women's organization that was accused of being closely related to communism. In its place, Soeharto established *Dharma Wanita* (literally 'Women's Duties') to keep women under the control of the state and their male citizens for more than 32 years. Women in the New Order era were instructed to accept a single ideal type of femininity and masculinity constructed by and for the regime (Dzuhayatin 2001; Yulianto 2006a).

Since the beginning of the reform movement in 1998, women's movements have regained their rightful positions in Indonesia's public sphere. Successive governments under the presidency of Abdurrachman Wahid, Megawati, and Bambang Yudoyono showed their support for women's roles in public affairs. One result of the more recent efforts of the Indonesian's women movement is the 30 per cent quota for women in parliament. Unfortunately, this new legal requirement has not been successfully enforced.

At the same time, Indonesian women have not enjoyed education on par with their male counterparts. The continued subordination of women makes them as vulnerable as before when confronted by strong pressures. Celebrity gossip shows are one of the latest examples of such pressures. These shows do not enhance women's intellectual capacity. Instead, these shows have succeeded to persuade women to stay at home and sit for hours each day in front of their televisions. In the past, and especially during the New Order era, the State enforced its ideal of domesticated femininity through state mechanisms. Since the end of the New Order, the media, through its plethora of morally and intellectually questionable gossip shows, has mediated between pleasure and conventional women's roles. Celebrity gossip shows have constituted a new kind of return to the domestication of women.

8 Television dreams

Simulation, for a new reality of Indonesia[1]

Edwin Jurriëns

Introduction

Since 14 August 2006, the Indonesian commercial television channel Metro TV has broadcast a weekly show called *Newsdotcom*. The name refers to a news agency of a fictional country called *Republik Mimpi* (Republic of Dreams, the programme's theme song calls it Dreaming Country), which provides the setting for critical but humorous discussions on Indonesian politics and the media. The show is a recent sequel to a television trend that started in late 2005, featuring mimetic representations of Indonesian politicians and other high-ranked social figures. This trend can be seen as the product of the enhanced freedom of speech in Indonesia since the fall of the authoritarian New Order regime of President Suharto in 1998, and the start of the subsequent process of social, political, and economic reform known as *Reformasi*. The introduction and continuation of the trend have not been without controversy.

In this chapter, I will analyse the format of *Newsdotcom*, discuss part of the discursive tradition it both derives and deviates from, and address some aspects of the controversy it has caused. The programme is usually classified as (political) parody, as it uses humour to re-contextualize and, thus, deconstruct existing social realities. I will argue, however, that the programme goes beyond parody, and also presents and validates its own alternative reality. The creation of this alternative reality, called Republic of Dreams, enables the programme to convey two seemingly contradictory messages to its audience. First, there is a rather euphoric message that *Reformasi* has become an undeniable, integrated part of Indonesian life. Second, there is a slightly less euphoric message that *Reformasi* is still very much in process, faced with many threats, and only viable if people continue to uphold their ideals.

I will describe *Newsdotcom*'s use of imagery to project a reality as an act of simulation, but one substantially different from the idea of simulation as conceived by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, or as applied in Ariel Heryanto's analysis of New Order's strategies of rule. Both Baudrillard's concept and – in Heryanto's view – New Order's practices of simulation

were intrinsically linked with simulacra, or signs without referents, designed to keep illusions intact, and turning simulation into an all-encompassing, inescapable condition. *Newsdotcom*, on the other hand, is a case of 'referential simulation' rather than 'simulacral simulation', as the programme deliberately and constantly breaks with the expectation of illusion by using parody, switching between the worlds of 'Republic of Dreams' and 'Indonesia', and instructing the viewers about the ideological mechanisms behind media production.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the format of *Newsdotcom* and several other programmes responsible for the popularity of the mimetic representations of politicians on Indonesian television. Then I will analyse how these programmes, *Newsdotcom* in particular, relate to the official political discourse as well as some of the popular discursive counter-strategies during the New Order. For this examination, I will use Heryanto's interpretation of both *plesetan* (punning as popular counter-discourse) and the Baudrillardian ideas of simulation and simulacra. Finally, I will discuss the former Minister of Communications and Informatics's distress about *Newsdotcom*. I argue that his distress may have been stirred by nostalgia for New Order-style, undisturbed and simulacra-dominated, simulation.

Mimesis on Indonesian Television

In every *Newsdotcom* episode, the Newsdotcom news agency offers a forum for discussion to the residents of the Republic of Dreams. This usually produces humorous but critical discussions on Indonesia, which is portrayed as the Republic of Dreams' neighbouring country (*negara tetangga*). The Republic of Dreams itself is sometimes presented as a never-never land (*negeri antah-berantah*). The Republic's capital is Yaharta, analogous to Indonesia's Jakarta. Its residents include President Si Butet Yoyga ('SBY'), Vice-President Jarwo Kuat (also spelled Kwat), and former presidents Suharta, Habudi, Gus Pur, and Megakarti, who all have uncanny similarities in name, appearance and speech to their real-life Indonesian counterparts, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (better known as SBY), Yusuf Kalla, Suharto, Habibie, Gus Dur, and Megawati respectively. For instance, Gus Pur, one of the most popular characters in the show, has the same seemingly indifferent, down-to-earth attitude as Gus Dur, reflected in his preference for using expressions such as 'For me, it is all easy' (*Buat saya sih gampang aja*) and 'Why worry?' (*Gitu aja kok repot*).

Each episode starts with the house-band performing the programme's theme song, which urges people to accept that 'criticism is normal' (*kritik itu biasa*). After this, the band, fictional characters, and the studio audience together sing the Republic's national anthem about 'a country in the clouds, where peace is the palace' (*sebuah negeri di awan, di mana kedamaian menjadi istananya*). During the show, the Presidential Advisor offers topics for discussion by providing short summaries of front-page stories from the

Indonesian newspapers. Former heads of state in the Republic and other guests then start joking and debating about the news. The studio guests always include groups of students from two or more Indonesian universities and several other invitees, such as politicians, actors, NGO activists, and representatives of other social groups. They are sometimes selected for a specific, fictional ministerial position, related to the show's main discussion topic. Later in the chapter, I will provide more details of the show's characters and other participants, and the topics of discussion. I will also discuss the significance of the theme song and national anthem, and the concepts of 'neighbouring country' and 'never-never land'.

Newsdotcom grew out of a trend of mimetic representations of political figures on Indonesian television that was set into motion by a programme called *Republik BBM* (*The BBM Republic*). Both programmes were invented by Effendi Gazali, a communications scholar from Universitas Indonesia (UI) in Jakarta.[2] BBM stood for *Benar-Benar Mabuk* ('Truly Drunken'), a play on the acronym for *Bahan Bakar Minyak* (Refined Fuel Oil), which can be frequently found on the front-pages of Indonesian newspapers, due to the highly controversial decision by the government to raise the price of BBM soon after Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono came to power, following similar but unsuccessful attempts by the previous government in 2003. The commercial channel Indosiar broadcast 26 episodes of *The BBM Republic* between December 2005 and June 2006.

Similar to the Republic of Dreams, the 'Truly Drunken' Republic was presented as a never-never land (*negeri antah-berantah*) with many similarities with its neighbouring country (*negara tetangga*) Indonesia. The fictional country had a President (played by Taufik Savalas), Vice-President (played by Kelik Pelipur Lara), State Secretary (played by Denny Chandra), and Presidential Advisor (played by Effendi Gazali). In every episode, they take the task of finding a suitable candidate for a ministerial post or other high position in society. They were assisted by members of the audience, including groups of students from different universities. Usually, two candidates were invited to present their ideas and compete for a position. The contestants were public figures, including artists, politicians, and high-profile professionals.

For instance, in episode 16, broadcast on 27 March 2006, the 'Minister of National Cleverness' (Menteri Pencerdikan Nasional), played by the singer–actress Inggrid Widjanarko, expressed her concern that many Indonesian school buildings were in bad condition, suffering from floods and deterioration by age. Therefore, she urged the President to appoint a 'Director-General for Re-Building Decrepit Schools' (Dirjen Ngebangun Sekolah Reot). The President agreed, and held an 'Extra-Ordinary Meeting' (*Rapat Luar Biasa*) with his staff and guests to decide between two candidates, Saswi and Ferly Junandar, both Indonesian television personalities. Viewers at home could participate in the election by sending short messages on their mobile phone. Studio guests included Indonesia's Chair of the People's

Consultative Council (Majelis Perwakilan Rakyat, or MPR), Hidayat Nurwahid, and students from Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang and Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta (Indosiar 2006a).

Controversy over *The BBM Republic* arose after a meeting between Indonesia's Vice-President Yusuf Kalla and the owners of seven commercial television stations on 8 April 2006. In the meeting, Kalla urged for the reduction of graphic contents in television programmes. Several television owners attempted to rescue their own broadcasting policies by pointing the finger at *The BBM Republic*, alleging that 'it crossed the line in poking fun at the country's leaders and went against local cultural norms' (*Jakarta Post* 2006). On 26 April 2006, Kalla organized a meeting with the cast of *The BBM Republic*. During a press conference after the meeting, which Kalla himself did not join, Gazali said the Vice-President had dismissed reports that he had urged the show to be taken off the air. According to Gazali, Kalla acknowledged the programme's constructive potential and was even prepared to make a guest appearance, but also suggested the producer should pay more attention to government achievements, and join in promoting national campaigns such as the fights against corruption and illegal logging (Hotland 2006).

Nevertheless, in June 2006, Indosiar discontinued broadcasting *The BBM Republic*. According to Gazali, since Kalla's meeting with the television owners, Indosiar had provided the programme producers with a list of 'dos and don'ts' that put many limitations on their creative freedom. In response, Gazali and Pelipur Lara refused to appear in the programme's final six episodes. Indosiar spokesman Ghufron Sakaril denied corporate pressure had been responsible for the decision to discontinue the programme. According to Sakaril, it had been agreed from the outset that *The BBM Republic* would only last for 26 episodes. During the programme's final broadcast, the producer remarked that now at least they had more time to watch the World Cup Soccer, the irony of which got lost in some of the press reports on the closure of the show (Taufiqurrahman 2006).

Following the cessation of *The BBM Republic*, the people previously involved in the show split into two groups, each inventing their own follow-up programme. The first group, including Taufiq Savalas and Denny Chandra, created *Istana BBM* (*The BBM Palace*, or *The Truly Drunken Palace*; *BBM* here also stood for *Benar-Benar Mabuk*), a situation comedy about the President's daily routine at the presidential palace. The second group, including Effendi Gazali and Kelip Pelipur Lara, started *Newsdotcom*. According to the creators of *The BBM Palace*, their programme had a 'human-comical' (*komedi-manusiawi*) approach (Indosiar 2006b). The programme, which was also broadcast by Indosiar and still dealt with the fictional BBM Republic, explored the individual characters and behaviour of the President (Taufiq Savalas) and his staff members. Institutions and symbols of state power were not treated as objects of veneration, but presented in humorous contexts to become topics of critical discussion.

For instance, the first episode of the programme was about the disappearance of the national flag from the presidential palace. Just as in real-life, in this show the flag was considered a heirloom (*pusaka*), and the loss prompted the interpretation that it was a bad omen that soon the President would fall and the country be struck by a disaster. The theme evolved comical situations, in which members of the presidential staff accused each other of stealing the flag. Even the help of a traditional medical practitioner (*dukun*) could not bring the 'sacred' object back (Indosiar 2006b).

During the 2006 Islamic fasting month (*Ramadhan*), the producers of *The BBM Palace* created a spin-off programme that was broadcast daily during the time of *sahur*, the meal eaten before daybreak. This programme was a variety show called *Fasting Month in the Palace* (*Ramadhan di Istana*) (Ivvaty 2006). The show included discussions on current affairs between the President and his staff with invited guests, including comedians, dancers, actors, and other public figures. It also had quizzes and religious teachings by Islamic scholars and leaders. The studio audience, consisting of groups of university students, had the opportunity to ask questions about religious issues to the presidential Islamic teacher, or *ustadz*. A special segment of the show was *BBC: BBM Broadcasting Center*. BBC was presented as The BBM Palace's centre of radio and television services, which functioned as 'a direct communications means between The BBM Republic government and its citizenry, as well as the people of the neighbouring country' [that is, Indonesia] (Budi 2006). This humorous reflection on the news media, which included sketches with fictional programme producers, was probably inspired by the example of *Newsdotdom*, which, compared with *The BBM Republic* and *The BBM Palace*, is most directly concerned with the role of the media in representing and constructing politics, as I will explain later.

Plesetan and hyper-reality

One of the antecedents of the three programmes discussed in the previous paragraph is Butet Kertaredjasa's – *Newsdotcom*'s President Si Butet Yogya – series of theatre monologues, which had already started in 1987 and only increased in popularity after 1998 (Emond 2007). During the New Order, it would have been unthinkable, though, that the same full-scale, quite literal embodiments of political figures as presented in *Newsdotcom*, *The BBM Republic*, and *The BBM Palace* would have appeared on national television, for a nationwide audience. The New Order leaders would have considered these creations to be in conflict with their own idea of a 'free but responsible' press and broadcasting media, implying that the media could not be very explicit and critical about domestic politics and leadership.[3] Many media institutions were forced to self-censorship, while others were simply banned, as happened in 1994 with the magazines *Tempo*, *Editor*, and *DeTik*.

At the same time, however, both media producers and consumers found creative and effective ways to circumvent or turn the government repression

on its head. A counter-strategy used by journalists from the print media was to invite their readers to 'read between the lines' (McDaniel 1994: 289). For instance, they would visibly juxtapose contradictory statements of government officials in their articles, but refrain from drawing any explicit conclusions, thus conveying political analysis while reducing the risk of censorship or worse. Another popular counter-strategy in the media, the arts, and popular culture, was so-called *plesetan*, a specific type of parody. *Plesetan* literally means 'slip of the tongue', but here refers to punning or wordgames, in which humorous effects are achieved by interchanging words and their meanings on the basis of sound association (Jurriëns 2004: 154).

Heryanto (1996) identified three types of *plesetan* that circulated in society during the New Order. The first type was wordplay for entertainment, not serving any explicit ideological goals. The second type aimed at reversing hierarchies and power relations, for instance by turning around names of official institutions or making a curse sound respectful. It was used as a counter-strategy by, or on behalf of, the weak, poor, or suppressed in society. The third type was *plesetan* as a radical and serious discipline, which was not merely oriented towards laughter or the reversal of social power relations, but questioned and undermined any grand narrative with truth claims (Heryanto 1996: 102–3). This discipline is similar to post-structuralist traditions that work to 'de-doxify cultural representations and their undeniable political import' (Hutcheon 1989: 3).

These types of *plesetan* have remained popular during the era of *Reformasi* and can also be found in the *The BBM Republic*, *The BBM Palace* and *Newsdotcom*. All three programmes contain entertaining wordplay, as manifested in the alternative use of the acronym BBM (the first type of *plesetan*), reverse social hierarchies by making fun of people in power (the second type), and *Newsdotcom* particularly also discusses the national media structurally, aiming at enhancing the media literacy of its audience (the third type). At the same time, I believe these programmes go beyond the reversal and deconstruction techniques of *plesetan*, by also inventing and validating alternative realities.

So what are these programmes, if not, or not only, *plesetan*? A statement by the producers of the *BBM Palace* on the Indosiar website hints that what is presented to the audience might be so-called hyper-reality:

> In the United States, there is currently a hyper-reality programmes fever, offering information and education about a prototypical life. Although the portrayed life is only fiction, it is as if it is real and feels close to the viewers' lives. In Indonesia, the phenomenon of hyper-reality has spread via the programme *The BBM* (*Truly Drunken*) *Republic*. Apparently *The BBM Republic* is accepted as a friendly country that really exists, as if the people are presented with a reality – which is in fact only an illusion.
>
> (Indosiar 2006b)

The hyper-reality that started on Indonesian television with *The BBM Republic*, as described in the quote, is both similar to and different from Baudrillard's concept. According to Baudrillard (1987), hyper-reality is symptomatic of the contemporary world being dominated by an 'ecstasy of communication' – that is, an abundance of sounds, images, and other sensations produced by modern media technology such as television – which has not only made people readily accept the imaginary, but has also caused the imaginary to take over reality as such.[4] One of his examples is the 1991 Gulf War, which was transmitted 'live', in real-time, for almost 24 hours a day by the US-based international broadcaster CNN (Baudrillard 1991). Although this media coverage suggested accuracy and proximity, Baudrillard rightly argued that it did not bring the viewers anywhere closer to what was actually happening on the battleground. The viewers had no option but to rely on the images on the screen, which seemed to provide microscopic detail but in fact took the war out of sight – as if it was not taking place – and were only there to confirm the ideological message of a 'clean war'. Baudrillard (1981: 1) called this process 'simulation', where the hyper-real precedes and replaces the real, thus reversing and undermining the laws of causality. Its constituents, the elements that keep the process of simulation going, are called simulacra, which consist of images without realities, signs without referents, or copies without originals (Baudrillard 1981: 6).

The example of the Gulf War showed how simulacra can be deliberately used for specific political and ideological purposes. Hyper-reality, then, is no longer a description of contemporary society's general condition, but rather functions as a discursive tool or device to be used and manipulated by political actors. Heryanto argues that simulacra prevailed during the New Order rule, and it 'mediates the inevitable discrepancies between the ambitious claims of the dominant discourse and what they can actually achieve' (2006b: 12). An example of a New Order simulacrum is the film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (the 30 September Movement/Indonesian Communist Party, The Treason of G30S/PKI). This film, which was annually shown on national television and at schools all over the country, was the officially sanctioned version of an alleged communist coup attempt on 30 September 1965, in the aftermath of which Suharto came to power, and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people designated as communists were imprisoned or killed. According to Heryanto, the point about this film and other simulacra used by the Suharto regime was not to make sure the Indonesian people really believed them, but rather to create and keep intact the illusion of New Order's total dominance and control (Heryanto 2006b: 13). The practices of *plesetan* discussed previously were signs that the regime's dominance and control was, in fact, far from total.

This brings us to the main difference between the hyper-reality of the Gulf War or the New Order on the one hand, and the hyper-reality of the BBM Republic, the BBM Palace and the Republic of Dreams on the other. While

the Bush Sr. and Suharto governments attempted to keep simulation intact and ward off any threats by which it could be disrupted, such as parody and *plesetan*, the producers of *The BBM Republic*, *The BBM Palace* and *Newsdotcom* made such disruptions an integral part of their simulation. While in New Order's totalizing discourse there was no place for any 'ironic voice' (Heryanto 2006b: 11), in the Indonesian television programmes different manifestations of *plesetan* can be found, as well as other elements that destabilize the imaginary, such as explanations about the workings of the media, and a constant switching between the dream-like or drunken countries and palaces, and real-life Indonesia. Thus, the imaginary offered by the television shows, while alluding to the New Order attempts at simulation, should be seen as a partial decoupling of simulation from simulacra. The images that are being used are far from empty or void of any meaning, and do not function as tools for any ambitions at total dominance or control.

The Republic of Dreams and Indonesia

I will now show how *Newsdotcom* both invents and validates its own simulation, the imaginary Republic of Dreams. As mentioned before, the Republic of Dreams is usually presented as Indonesia's neighbouring country, and sometimes as a never-never land (*negeri antah-berantah*). 'Neighbouring country' expresses difference, but spatial proximity, with Indonesia. 'Never-never land' implies more radical differences between the two countries in terms of space, time, and even reality. While both references seem to indicate that the Republic of Dreams is *not* Indonesia, if not entirely fictional, I will provide a different interpretation of the relation between the Republic of Dreams and Indonesia. My interpretation is based, amongst other things, on an analysis of the Republic of Dreams' national anthem and *Newsdotcom*'s theme song.

The national anthem, composed by the Indonesian pop musician Katon Bagaskara, always immediately follows the programme's theme song at the start of each episode. It is performed by the *Newsdotcom* house-band, singing together with the Republic of Dreams residents, their special guests, and the audience members:

> You play for me
> A song
> About a country
> In the clouds
> Where peace
> Becomes the palace
> And now
> Listening to your performance
> I am
> Heading to that place.[5]

This song can be interpreted as the news agency Newsdotcom introducing ('playing a song' about) the Republic of Dreams as a 'country in the clouds' (*negeri di awan*), which may refer to the imaginary character of the country, or to the role of the medium of television and the process of simulation in shaping such imagination. The country is portrayed as a peaceful, democratic place, perhaps alluding to an ideal picture of the progress of Indonesia's *Reformasi*. The studio guests and viewers at home are allured into visiting the place, which could be interpreted as encouraging them to try and realize the peaceful and democratic ideals in their own country, Indonesia.

The reason for my connecting the characteristics of the Republic of Dreams to Indonesia is because of the lyrics of *Newsdotcom*'s theme song do not seem to be about a fictional country at all, but Indonesia as the audience knows it. The song addresses the studio guests and viewers at home by talking about 'we' (*kita*, including both the speaker and the addressee) and 'this country' (*negeri ini*, that is, Indonesia), and using different types of imperative to provoke concrete action, such as 'don't' (*jangan*) and 'come on' (*ayo*). Although it welcomes the audience to the 'Republic of Dreams', at the same time it admonishes the listeners 'to wake up from dreaming', and start acting quickly, that is, 'to do something as small as it may be', even in a situation where 'this country is still in deep trouble'. This is another reference to *Reformasi*, which in scholarly literature is often portrayed as a troublesome, transitional period from totalitarianism to democracy (Schulte-Nordholt 2002: 1–24). One of the main agendas of *Reformasi* addressed in the song is the implementation of democratic rule, demanding that politicians as well as ordinary citizens agree that 'criticism is normal'. The studio guests and audience members always stand and put their hand on their breast when singing the Republic of Dreams' national anthem, as if making a pledge to stick to the principles of Indonesia's new democracy indeed.

As the theme song and national anthem make clear, *Newsdotcom* does not only present past and current political structures in a *plesetan* context of entertainment, reversal or de-doxification. Rather, it also projects a vision of a new Indonesia, where people need to continue to fight for the ideals of reform, and ensure that their country will never fall again under a regime with totalitarian ambitions. In order to convey this message to the audience, the programme uses its created Republic of Dreams, a simulation or hyper-reality that is disrupted, partially decoupled from simulacra. The choice of this specific medium of hyper-reality could be interpreted as a signal that *plesetan* – in spite of its continuing creative and critical potential, as also exploited by the makers of *Newsdotcom* – is in a sense something of Indonesia's past, which received its ultimate, euphoric finale with the very fall of the New Order and the introduction of *Reformasi*.

As mentioned before, *Newsdotcom*'s specific message about *Reformasi* is that it is, and should continue to be, an essential part of Indonesian daily life and public debate. In her work on the relation between politics and the

press during the New Order, Angela Romano explains that Suharto and other political figures engaged with the media 'in a fashion that prevented direct accountability through public interrogation of his [Suharto's] actions or policies' (2003: 117–18). Business leaders were also often reluctant to share information with journalists, and documentary information was hard to obtain (Romano 2003:134). The only groups that were relatively easy to approach and obtain information from were NGOs, academics, religious leaders, and certain retired generals (Romano 2003: 138). The common people were almost never accessed as a source of information or opinion (Romano 2003: 141). I believe the New Order leaders could not permit the media to present alternative representations of themselves or the people, as this would threaten their own simulation of Indonesian politics, society and the state. *Newsdotcom*, on the other hand, uses its very creation of fictional characters, selection of special guests and spatial organization of the studio set to suggest that the actors and terms of political debate have changed since *Reformasi*, and that simulation with the aim of control and intimidation no longer has a place in contemporary Indonesia.

To illustrate more clearly how this works in the show, let us return to where I left it with *Newsdotcom*'s theme song and the Republic of Dreams' national anthem. After the singing of the anthem, the host, Olga Lydia, in her position as Cabinet Secretary, always introduces the President (played by Butet Kertaredjasa), Vice-President (played by Sujarwo), Presidential Advisor (played by Gazali) and their honorary guests – usually former presidents – including Gus Pur (played by Handoyo), Megakarti (played by Sukarti), Habudi (played by Budi Setiawan) and Suharta (played by Burhan Uemuluk, with his voice dubbed by Butet Kertaredjasa). Lydia also welcomes the viewers at home and the studio audience, including students from two or more Indonesian universities.

Government officials and former presidents of the Republic of Dreams sit opposite to, but in close proximity with, the studio audience in a circular arena. A second host, Presidential Secretary Anya Dwinov, even sits in the audience in order to conduct on-the-spot interviews with the students and special guests. Another regular *Newsdotcom* member sitting in the audience is Iwel Wel – a nickname for Welnadi, one of the producers of the show. He is usually introduced either in his fictional capacity of 'young Republic of Dreams intellectual' or with his 'real' identity of 'Indonesia's first stand-up comedian'. During the show, Iwel Wel interviews audience members and is sometimes asked to give his views about certain matters to the Republic's government members. Another character, Isa, the Republic's 'Spokesperson for the Less Affluent People', usually appears in the audience near the end of the programme, in order to convey a message to the government on behalf of the common people.

Newsdotcom's creation of characters, selection of studio guests, and spatial organization of the studio set all project a vision of reform in which students[6] and other groups from civil society have the opportunity to get

into direct dialogue with politicians, whether impersonated or real, and are acknowledged as alternative sources of authority. The show also brings high politics closer to daily life by presenting characters that not only have physical similarities with their Indonesian counterparts, but also strong resemblances in voice and personal or political attitude. These *plesetan* techniques confirm that the Republic of Dreams does not consist of empty, meaningless signs, but in fact invites the Indonesian audience to learn their real political leaders better, and identify some of the ideological motives behind their decision-making.

For instance, similar to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Si Butet Yogyakarta often makes dutiful but empty promises to take action and tackle a problem by starting his statements with *Saya akan* ('I will ... '). Similar to Yusuf Kalla, Jarwo Kuat often uses Arabic expressions such as *Alhamdulillah* ('Praise be to God') and switches codes between Indonesian and English. Sometimes he makes a statement in Indonesian, before continuing with an idiosyncratic translation into English, as in '*karena apa*, because what ... '. His more politically oriented discourse includes the important-sounding, but fairly hollow, phrase 'relevant and significant' (*relevan dan signifikan*). As mentioned before, Gus Pur has the same seemingly easy-going, down-to-earth attitude as Gus Dur. Megakarti often starts with a short statement by exclaiming the nationalist phrase 'Freedom!' (*Merdeka!*), which refers to Megawati's attempts to increase her popularity by building on the revolutionary past of her father and Indonesia's first President, Sukarno. Habudi reflects Habibie's obsession with technology by offering 'high-tech' as the solution to any problem, irrespective of its nature. Suharta's speech is interspersed with Suharto-type Javanese speech and symbolism. The character of Isa represents someone from the lower economic stratum, who stutters grammatically conflicted, monotonous sentences in his over-zealous attempts to sound polite and educated.

The President's political behaviour was clearly depicted in scenes on a conflict between Si Butet Yogya and Megakarti. The scenes were an ironic reaction to Megawati's comments in the Indonesian press that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was only 'spreading around charm' (*tebar pesona*), but had no real policies or solutions to problems. In a guest appearance of the *Newsdotcom* actors on Metro TV's talk show *Kick Andy*[7] on 25 January 2007, Megakarti advised the President 'not too much spread around charm, but rather spread around more work'. The President replied that it was better 'to let the people decide which between them was talking nonsense, and who was working day and night'. In the *Newsdotcom* episode of 14 January 2007, Gazali referred to a news article from the 11 January 2007 edition of the *Media Indonesia* newspaper. It reported that Megawati had made her *tebar pesona* comments during the celebration of the thirty-fourth anniversary of her political party, the Indonesian Democracy Party – Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, or PDI-P). In humorous sketches in the programme, Si Butet Yogya showed his predilection for

making dutiful promises and for lack of action by stating that he 'would solve' problems related to the rebuilding of Tsunami-struck Aceh and the rescue of the people in the Sidoarjo region, who were hit by large flows of hot mud erupting from the soil.

Arguably the most groundbreaking and controversial sketches in *Newsdotcom* involved former President Suharta impersonating Suharto, the former president. Suharta is played by an amateur actor with a strong physical resemblance to Suharto, while his voice is dubbed by Butet Kartaredjasa. For years Kartaredjasa has had the reputation for his mastery in mimicking Suharto's low voice, slow speech, and quasi-ceremonial idiosyncrasies, which include the use of the verbal suffix–*ken* (instead of–*kan*), the use of adjective clause *yang mana* ('in such a manner') or preposition *daripada* in ways that are stylistically old-fashioned. For an illustration, I will present two interviews between Gazali and Suharta, which were broadcast on 28 January and 18 February 2007 respectively. Both interviews were pre-recorded, and situated outside the usual *Newsdotcom* studio setting, in a place that resembled the presidential palace. The pre-recording technique enabled the producer to dub Suharta's voice before the programme was broadcast, although Gazali explained to the viewers that the recording technique was needed because of Suharta's bad 'health situation'.

In the first interview, Gazali asked Suharta for his view of 'students', whether they reminded him of the 1945 Revolution or his own downfall in 1998. Suharta first did not realize that the studio audience of *Newsdotcom* were students, but rather thought they were members of *kelompencapir* (an acronym for *kelompok pendengar, pembaca dan pemirsa*), the government-organized radio-listening, literature-reading, and television-viewing groups in the Indonesian cities and villages during the New Order (McDaniel 1994: 239, 299). Suharta responded that students reminded him of *Tapos* – the name of Suharto's vacation ranch built on confiscated farm land – confusing it with *tapol*, an acronym for political prisoners (*tahanan politik*). Suharta, unlike real Suharto, expressed his sympathy for the student protests in 1998, and even declared he would have joined the protests if he had been a student himself. He admonished the students to continue protesting for the good cause, but not at the expense of their studies. He was prepared to go to trial, but – just like Suharto – demanded that the trial be stopped if he should fall ill again.

In the second interview, Gazali interviewed Suharta together with the attorney-general (*jaksa agung*) Abdul Manan Saleh (Abdul 'Who is Pious'; abbreviated to Aman, or 'Safe'), alluding to Indonesia's attorney-general Abdul Rahman Saleh. Abdul Manan Saleh prepared to file a civil lawsuit against the former President. Suharta said the attorney-general also reminded him of 'Tapos', because he thought the abbreviation for *jaksa agung* was *jagung*, or 'corn', one of the crops cultivated at his farm. During this interview, Suharta was dressed casually, even wearing a Liverpool soccer scarf. To Gazali's question of how things were going, the two interviewees responded,

in accordance with their names, *aman* ('safe') and *suharta* ('wealthy') respectively. Suharta added, however, that he had difficulties in giving a straightforward answer to Gazali's question:

> Your question puts me in a trap. Any answer will be wrong. If I answer that I am healthy the people will shout, as the team of doctors declared that I was permanently ill. If I answer that I am ill the people will remain shouting, because I look so healthy.

The producer regularly invites members of the ordinary public in order to recount their personal stories related to the effects of (incompetent) government action. These stories immediately bring the audience back from the simulated realm of the Republic of Dreams to the Indonesian reality. For instance, the 28 January 2007 episode featured two survivors of the sunken Senopati Nusantara motor-ship, while the 11 February 2007 episode had three homeless people from flood-struck Jakarta. In the first case, The Republic of Dreams politicians expressed their disapproval about the financial compensation arrangements for relatives of the victims of the sunken motor-ship. They believed class-action was called for, as had been applied to the predominantly middle-class victims of the Adam Air aeroplane crash. In the case of the latter, 500,000,000 Rupiah was paid per person, while only 5,000,000 Rupiah was offered to the predominantly low-income class victims of the motor-ship disaster. With regard to the Jakarta floods, they blamed Jakarta's governor Sutiyoso – whose impersonated character appeared on the show – for having called the floods a 'natural phenomenon' (*fenomena alam*). They argued that the floods were annual incidents that could, and should, have been better anticipated.

In their February 2007 broadcasts, the *Newsdotcom* team started an energy-saving campaign, by reminding the audience neither to steal electricity nor use more than two lights at home between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. They also expressed their support for several small-scale development projects in Indonesia. For instance, in the 18 and 25 February broadcasts, Tri Mumpuni was invited. She was involved in developing alternative, water-powered electricity facilities in villages whose needs were not served by Indonesia's national electricity company. In the 25 February episode, an official Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Mumpuni and a representative of a co-operation that was prepared to invest money in the facilities. In a remarkable television moment, in which the distinction between simulation and reality entirely dissolved, the Memorandum was signed with a fictional character, President Si Butet Yogya, as the official legal witness. Sometimes the *Newsdotcom* team itself descends from the realm of dreams to 'the field' (real-life Indonesia), as in the 18 March episode that showed footage of a visit to mud-struck Sidoarjo. During the visit, the team interviewed, entertained, and expressed their solidarity with the victims of the disaster.

In the Republic of Dreams, Isa, representing the less-affluent, attempts to bring the interests of the common people to the attention of the President and his ministers. In his efforts to be polite, Isa always constructs grammatically incorrect sentences. He often conveys his messages in self-made poetry, which is funny in form as well as content. In one of his dialogues with the government members, Isa expressed his concern about the highly controversial Indonesian Government Regulation (Peraturan Pemerintah) no. 37 of 2006/2007, which put into effect an increase in the allowances for members of the Regional Parliaments (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat-Daerah, or DPRD). In a meandering introduction, with sentences full of loops, he politely asked for permission to talk with the President. He was interrupted by Vice-President Jarwo Kuat, who made comments on Isa's speech pattern but was unintentionally reflecting his own ineffective communication skills:

> Isa: 'Good evening, Mister President. Allow me to talk with you. With you talking, allow me. Mister President, talking do you want with, allow me'.
>
> Si Butet Yogya: 'Yeah yeah yeah yeah, although you talk back and forth as if you were ironing, I understand what you mean. Please, talk'.
>
> Isa: 'Many people recently said that I should give a short report. A short report. A report that is just short'.
>
> Jarwo Kuat; 'Mister President, we have to understand why Mister Isa talks like that. He was born in a motorized pedicab. That's why he often speaks 'zig-zag' like that'.
>
> Isa: 'Thank you, Mister Vice-President. Only now I know that you helped my mother with giving birth to me'.

After the long and confusing introduction, Isa presented his plea by reading a poem with the complex title 'I am a less-affluent person who objects to the Government Regulation no. 37 that was issued in the years 2006–7'. After reading the first stanza, Isa threw several pages of his poem on the floor, 'in order to look like WS Rendra', one of Indonesia's best-known poet–performers. Then he continued with reading the final stanza, which contained Isa's main message to the President. Apparently unconsciously, he made a *plesetan* by confusing the 'PP' as in *Peraturan Pemerintah* (Government Regulation) with the other 'PP' as *Pengangkutan Penumpang* (Passenger Transportation).

Apart from the use of *plesetan* and the constant switching between the Republic of Dreams and real-life Indonesia, *Newsdotcom* also disrupts the imaginary character of the programme and television generally by providing media education to its viewers. Gazali explained that he created the programme to 'educate people to watch the news' and give 'political education in a humorous package' (Andri 2006a). His creation was also meant to be an alternative to the abundance of infotainment, soap opera (*sinetron*) and programmes dealing with superstition (the genre of *horror, misteri*, or

mistik) on Indonesian television (Andri 2006b); that is, all genres or programmes that generally hardly contain any critical reflection on their own processes of simulation. Gazali is said to be inspired by current affairs shows from the US, such as the *Jon Stewart Daily Show*, *Jay Leno* and *David Letterman* (Andri 2006a), although his show also displays similarities with programmes such as *Spitting Image* (UK), *Les Guignols* (France) and *Kopspijkers* (The Netherlands), which use puppets or human actors in their mimetic portrayal of political figures.

One of the genres being regularly analysed and ridiculed in the programme is infotainment (see also Chapter 7 in this book). For instance, in the 14 January 2007 episode an article from the popular tabloid *Cek n Ricek* (*Check 'n' Re-Check*) about the all-girl band Trio Macan (Tiger Trio), known for their sensual performances including tiger-like costumes and movements, was ironically presented as 'intellectual, scholarly news' (*berita ilmiah, intelek*). In the same episode Gus Pur also made an ironical remark about a clumsy headline of the much more serious newspaper *Media Indonesia*. In other episodes (21 January 2007 and 18 February 2007), the system, benefits, and disadvantages of television ratings were explained to the viewers.

The 21 January 2007 episode was one of the episodes that paid comprehensive attention to the relation between politics and the press. The special guest was political scientist and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's spokesperson, Andi Mallarangeng. Mallarangeng was interviewed about his role in informing the press about the President, and also asked about the President's opinion on the new phenomenon of political commentary on Indonesian television. Mallarangeng declared that the Indonesian President found *Newsdotcom* refreshing and constructive, but emphasized that politicians and critics should have a sense of mutual tolerance, and know about the 'legal framework' of what was legally acceptable, and what was not. Gazali reacted to Mallarangeng's comments by explaining the benefits of constructive criticism generally, and *Newsdotcom*'s attempts to offer 'elegant criticism' particularly. Later in the programme, Gazali also remarked that it could no longer be denied that 'modern politics nowadays was a politics of imagery', implying that simulation was not only an integral part of the media industry, but also politics.

Nostalgia for simulacra

Indonesia's former Minister of Communications and Informatics (Menteri Komunikasi dan Informatika), Sofyan Djalil, could not appreciate *Newsdotcom*'s play with, and comments on, the politics of simulation and the simulation of politics. On 1 March 2007, Djalil told journalists that he considered issuing a legal notice (*somasi*) against *Newsdotcom*, as he did not agree with 'the President being mocked' (Hayid 2007). I argue that the Minister's discourse can be seen as an expression of nostalgia for 'the reign

of simulacra' (Heryanto 2006b: 140) as during the New Order. I will also discuss some of the creative counter-discourse against the Minister that was employed by the producer. Only a day after the *somasi* statement, the producer was confronted with another blow, when the main sponsor – the cigarette company Sampoerna – announced its intent to terminate its sponsorship contract that had expired at the end of February, and re-direct its sponsorship to activities on sports and music events (Fadil 2007b). The company explained there had been internal agreement on the decision two days earlier, on 28 February, implying that it had not been influenced by Djalil's comments (Fadil 2007a).

As a form of protest against the threats, the *Newsdotcom* team changed the name of their republic into a monarchy, The Kingdom of Dreams, in the 4 March 2007 episode. While 'President SBY' in the Republic of Dreams was a democratically elected and open leader, 'King SBY' (still played by Butet Kartaredjasa) in the Kingdom of Dreams was portrayed as someone who stood above the law, immune to any criticism, similar to President Suharto during the New Order. In anticipation of a fierce legal battle, and in an attempt to prompt support from different sections in society, the on-air debates in this and following programmes centred heavily on the ministerial threats, the function of *Newsdotcom*, and the nature of democracy generally.

The 4 March programme opened with Si Butet Yogya giving a video conference in which he read out a decree changing the republic into a kingdom. He gave three reasons for the change: (a) it was nicer to be a king than a president; (b) unlike presidents, kings were not allowed to be criticized; and (c) unlike the presidential institution, the royal institution could not be de-legitimized. According to King SBY, the change would affect the bureaucratic system accordingly: high officials would receive high salaries, low officials would receive low salaries, and the people would be subjected to higher prices of rice. He concluded by stating that 'this decree was based on the irritation that had arisen in the commotion about the legal notice, as there was a minister who did not yet understand democracy'. In other words, the decree was presented as a token serving the ambition of total dominance and control, in a humorous but critical allusion to the Minister's more serious attempts at simulating such dominance and control.

During the episode, the new king cynically joked that he preferred living in a kingdom, as 'everything was comfortable and nice'. Jarwo Kuat, now Prime Minister instead of Vice-President, made a *plesetan* of his own name, saying he was feeling 'stronger and stronger' because of the political threats. Gus Pur applauded Gazali for never considering a career in politics. He believed that creativity would never die and that 'many great works had come into being from behind iron bars'. He also thought the Department of Communications and Informatics was of no use, and should be abolished or restricted to purely technological issues, as the public was capable of

assessing what they saw. Iwel Wel gave examples of political parody in other countries, arguing that even an 'arrogant' George Bush accepted being parodied by actors such as Steve Bridges. Students and fellow journalists in the audience, showing their media savvyness, wondered why *Newsdotcom* was under political threat, while programmes that contained nudity, superstition, and violence were allowed. This indicates that the protests against the *somasi* statement developed into discussion and education about the role of the media, exactly the type of purpose the programme was designed for by its creators.

The Republic of Dreams government made it clear that the Indonesian political landscape had undergone major changes since *Reformasi* by citing support from real Indonesian life politicians, including the ones parodied in the programme. In newspaper articles or in person, Gus Dur, Megawati, Habibie and, ironically, even the Suharto family had all declared they enjoyed the programme and did not feel offended by it (Tresnawati 2007). During the show, the previously broadcast interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's spokesperson, Andi Mallarangeng, was repeated, reminding all that Indonesia's President did not object to the programme. Special studio guest Amien Rais, a *Reformasi* figure and co-founder of the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, or PAN), argued that politicians who could not deal with parody and criticism needed more self-confidence and a better understanding that there was always room for improvement. Criticism should therefore be seen as 'a medicine for strength'. Referring to a similar example of political parody from US television, *D.C. Follies*, which was broadcast with few restrictions, Rais believed that 'governments that exercised censorship perhaps signalled that they would not last much longer'.

The *Newsdotcom* team suspected that references to a corruption case in the previous episode of 25 February were the main trigger for the *somasi* comments. The case was presented by Isa, the Spokesperson for Less-Affluent People, in the form of a riddle (*teka-teki*). The answer to the riddle's main question – 'What is behind the letters B-L-B-I?' – was 'A red carpet'. In his characteristically indirect way, Isa suggested that the perpetrators of the BLBI (*Bantuan Likuiditas Bank Indonesia*, Bank Indonesia Liquidity Support) corruption case, where trillions of Rupiah in state-funds had been embezzled, were not accused but welcomed as honorary guests at the Presidential palace.[8] It alluded to a government decision that eight of the corruptors would not be sentenced if they were prepared to return the stolen money to the state (Shaleh 2006).

In the 11 March 2007 episode, Gus Pur, still angry that the programme was under *somasi* threats, re-emphasized that the change from a republic into a kingdom was an act of resistance. Anya Dwinov showed information from surveys that confirmed that the majority of the public supported *Newsdotcom*. In that episode fragments from an Arte France TV feature on *Newsdotcom* were played to demonstrate that the show had also received

international attention.[9] Special guests in the programme were musicians and women activists, including Sinta Nuriyah Wahid, Gus Dur's wife. They were invited in the context of Indonesia's Music Day (9 March) and International Women's Day (8 March). These also demonstrate clearly the two groups in society that stood behind *Newsdotcom* and the freedom of expression in Indonesia. In newspaper interviews, Sinta Wahid confirmed her husband had no problem with being parodied in *Newsdotcom*, and believed the humour in the programme served the political education of the people (Tresnawati 2007).

The Kingdom of Dreams lasted for only two episodes before it reverted to a republic, as officially confirmed by public decree of King SBY, 18 March 2007. After reading the decree, Si Butet Yogya exchanged his crown for an Indonesian-styled Muslim cap called *peci*, and Jarwo Kuat removed his prime-ministerial decorations to become Vice-President again. The President and Vice-President declared that the symbolic return to republican status was meant as a sign of self-confidence and stand against political threat. It could be read as a reminder to Indonesia's contemporary political leaders to refrain from using 'royal', New Order-like simulacra for exercising and legitimizing their power.

The 18 March episode became an even more unique television event when immediately following the reading of the decree, Djalil himself made a guest appearance. In a remarkably open conversation, the Republic of Dreams government gave him the opportunity to explain why he had considered taking action against *Newsdotcom*. Djalil emphasized that he had spoken as a private citizen, not as the Minister of Communications and Informatics. He thought the programme set a bad example, ridiculing rather than confirming political and social figures as models for society:

> I have criticized this programme not in my capacity as minister. I have criticized this programme in my capacity as private citizen. I feel that this programme has more disadvantages than benefits in the framework of us creating a healthier democracy, in the framework of creating a tradition of having a healthy democracy. Why? There are many, rather many, reasons. According to me 'leadership' [Djalil used the English expression] at all levels has to be respected. Why? The people need leadership figures. A village head has to be respected so he can fulfil his tasks. Then, teachers have to be respected so they can educate their pupils. Lecturers have to be respected so they can teach their students. Islamic teachers and Christian priests have to be respected so they can be informal leaders. If all this 'leadership' becomes the object of 'ridicule', to use an English expression, or mocking, our people will lose orientation as a consequence. Therefore I say that this programme [has more disadvantages than benefits] if its contents is only like in the previous periods. But last week I saw that the programme had already changed [that is, improved] a fair bit.

I have quoted Djalil's statement at length, as an illustration of his nostalgia for order based on simulacra-driven simulation, that is, a New Order-like ambition to create a country where social and political leaders enjoyed untouchable positions, detached from and controlling the common people. Djalil's discourse also shows his anxiety of losing this order, of seeing it disrupted and replaced by unstable simulations that are less dependent on simulacra and open to *plesetan*. This may, in fact, express an anxiety about the uncertainties and ambitions of the *Reformasi*. In a reaction, Gus Pur typically, bravely, but humorously disagreed with the Minister by saying that 'true leadership cannot be mocked . . . why bother just because of that'? This is a *plesetan* for saying that true leadership *can* be mocked, and *accepts* being mocked. Djalil was also challenged by a representative of the Association of Muslim Scholars (Nahdlatul Ulama, or NU), who argued that the issuing of a legal notice against *Newsdotcom* would look purely a bad political move, and questioned why the Minister did nothing to programmes containing violence and nudity. Djalil responded that he, in co-operation with the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, or KPI), would act to ensure violence and nudity would no longer be tolerated on Indonesian television between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. Thus, by the end of the programme, the focus of ministerial attention seemed to have shifted, peace between the *Newsdotcom* team and Djalil was temporarily restored. It remained unclear, however, whether this was just a short reprieve for the programme, or a sign of the Indonesian leadership's sincere and enduring acceptance of its country's new social and political realities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how *Newsdotcom* represents a new trend of hyper-reality on Indonesian television. This hyper-reality is not detached from Indonesian reality, but presents a vision of *Reformasi*, and attempts to give the Indonesian television audience education about politics and the media. It also alludes to Indonesia's past, putting New Order's version of hyper-reality in a simultaneously humorous and critical perspective. While New Order's practices of simulation relied heavily on simulacra – opaque or empty signs without referents in the real – to generate an intimidating impression of total control, *Newsdotcom* constantly undermines the stability of its own simulation called the Republic of Dreams by using *plesetan*, making explicit references to real Indonesia, and revealing the constructed and ideological character of media imagery.

In doing this, *Newsdotcom* also offers an opportunity for analysts to reinterpret Baudrillard's concept of simulation. While simulation might be the inescapable condition of contemporary society, as Baudrillard argues, *Newsdotcom* shows that the hyper-real can also be used as a creative and critical device. In the programme, hyper-real imagery brings aspects of Indonesian politics that had been suppressed in public life by the dominance of

New Order simulacra to the attention of the Indonesian audience. The programme's hyper-reality decouples simulation from simulacra, proving it not to be incompatible with *plesetan*, while also signalling a phase in Indonesian politics and social life where people no longer have to rely on the relatively few and indirect strategies such as *plesetan* for expressing diversity or dissent in the Indonesian public sphere.

Finally, does all this mean *Newsdotcom* is free from any co-optation itself? In an interview with *Kompas* (Hartiningsih and Khoiri 2007), Gazali pointed to the irony that he and his fellow-actors now had become celebrities themselves, while trying to present an alternative to consumerism and celebrity-culture promoted on Indonesian television by genres such as *sinetron* and infotainment. He also acknowledged, with regret, that *Newsdotcom* was interspersed with commercials, which made the programme financially viable but were at the expense of prolonged, in-depth discussion and analysis. Gazali was confident, however, he would never be co-opted by the celebrity culture of Indonesian politics, as he preferred to keep his critical distance as a producer of the television programme and academician: 'Whoever enters [the political system] will be completely pulverized. For me, it is more interesting to remain what I am, a lecturer' (Hartiningsih and Khoiri 2007).

Notes

1 Parts of this chapter earlier appeared in Jurriëns (2007).
2 Gazali belongs to a group of scholars from UI's Communications Department who call themselves the 'Depok School'. 'Depok' refers to the name of the Jakartan suburb where the UI campus is located. At the same time, 'Depok School' is a clear allusion to the Frankfurter Schule, the school of thought of which Jürgen Habermas, the most creative thinker on the idea of the public sphere, is considered to be a late representative. Gazali and his colleagues have tried to promote the idea of the public sphere and public media in Indonesia through their university courses, media training workshops and publications (for instance, Gazali 2002). The creation of *Newsdotcom* also falls in the category of activities meant to represent the public interest and provide an alternative to government-controlled and commercial media.
3 A 'free but responsible' press – in contrast to the 'libertine' and 'irresponsible' Western press – meant, amongst other things, that it had to act as the guardian of the national Pancasila ideology and avoid sensational reporting about issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations (*suku*, *agama*, *ras* and *antargolongan*, respectively, commonly abbreviated to the acronym SARA). The government installed specific laws and institutions, particularly the notorious Department of Information, to control local media. The print as well as electronic media were obliged to have licences, while their employees had to become members of government-ruled professional associations. The government could withdraw media licences at its discretion, while dissident journalists ran the risk of imprisonment or worse (Hill 1995: 37–54; Sen and Hill 2000: 56, 67–69; Romano 2003: 40–46).
4 According to Heryanto (2006b), Baudrillard's concept exaggerates the role of the modern mass media in creating hyper-reality. He rightly argues that the Greek philosopher Plato already discussed and criticized the existence of simulacra,

referring to the activities of the poets and other writers of his time (Heryanto 2006b: 157). In the conclusion of this article, I will present my own critique of Baudrillard's concept.

5 All translations from Indonesian are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

6 The visibility of the students in the audience can be explained by the involvement of academics from Universitas Indonesia in the production of the program. It also confirms the prominent position of student activism in both scholarly and non-scholarly narratives on key moments in Indonesian history. Heryanto (2006b: 70) is sceptical about these narratives though, including those that emphasize the involvement of the student movement in the overthrow of Suharto. He acknowledges that 'successive governments have been irritated by student activists and have repeatedly punished them with considerable severity for criticizing the status quo', but at the same time argues that 'Indonesian student activism has political significance insofar as it enjoys the special privilege rendered to it by the dominant discourse' (Heryanto 2006b: 70).

7 This weekly show is presented by the journalist Andy F. Noya. It addresses topical issues in a mix of entertainment and critical discussion.

8 From August 1997 to early 1999, the Indonesian government – via the state bank Bank Indonesia – provided liquidity support amounting to Rp. 144.5 trillion to assist 48 commercial banks in coping with massive runs during the monetary crisis. An estimated 95 per cent of the money was eventually embezzled (Saraswati 2002).

9 In the episodes of 4 and 18 March 2007, film crews and journalists from Australia, Japan, and Singapore were visibly present in the studio, exploring material that could be used for their own features or articles on *Newsdotcom*.

9 Other worlds in Yogyakarta

From jatilan to electronic music

Max M. Richter

Since the final years of the twentieth century, Indonesian society has experienced and negotiated particularly intense and multi-faceted social change. In the onset of the economic crisis in 1997, and the downfall of Suharto the following year, intergroup and interpersonal tensions sometimes erupted into open conflict, democratization lunged forth hand-in-hand with the implementation of Regional Autonomy, and, more recently, natural disasters have devastated large areas. Discussion of the cultural dimensions of this period has generally been hindered by a lack of post-New Order conceptual tools, and geo-political preoccupation with regional terrorism has dominated intellectual circles. In this light, studies into the burgeoning arenas of pop culture and new media offer fresh insights into the everyday lives and aspirations of people in the region.

As part of a broader study of cultures of tolerance and processes of genre formation in Southeast Asia, in this chapter I analyse a small number of musical events that I witnessed in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta in 2001. The events were characterized by participants' highly physical and animated entries into what I wish to call Other Worlds. Such musical physicalizations ranged from neighbourhood trance dancing and impersonations of mythic legends, to the rebellious or celebratory swinging around of one's entire body in commercial zones. In each case, such physicalizations contrast with the highly understated mannerisms for which social interaction in the region is renowned. I compare neighbourhood and commercial-zone popular culture forms in this context, and seek to complexify a broad set of dichotomies that are, to varying degrees, employed to characterize Javanese social relations. By doing so, I relate these forms and settings to the correlations often made between 'coarse' (*kasar*) behaviour and social powerlessness in Java. I shall argue that these Other Worlds physicalizations often produce outlets of expression that help to transcend performer/audience, gender, generational, and class divisions. In order to situate these localized events in their broader context, I begin with a brief discussion of key concepts.

Music, Small (1998) notes, is not a 'thing' but an activity. Whatever its packaging and medium of transmission, the enduring appeal of music is primarily temporal and invisible. As 'humanly organized sound' (Blacking

1973: 3), music is 'what any social group consider[s] it to be' (Stokes 1994: 5). While these factors make music an elusive topic of scholarly research, its pervasiveness in society is difficult to exaggerate. Engaging the complex concept of 'popular culture' helps to bring to light the roles that various musics play in everyday social relations.

Given the multiple meanings of its constituent concepts,[1] it is no surprise that the notion of 'popular culture' is also broad and complex. 'Popular culture', as Davey and Seal succinctly state, 'is generally understood to refer to the products and effects of the mass communications industries' (1993: ix). In the 1930s and 40s, sociologists tended to equate popular culture with passivization of the masses against the people's folk culture. This view has come under serious challenge since the 1950s, particularly through studies that highlight the agency in consumers' interpretations and appropriations of popular culture products (Edgar and Sedgwick 1999: 285–87). Nonetheless, debates over the role of popular culture in society are by no means resolved. This is evident in the fact that most scholarly introductions to popular music include a critical engagement with Adorno and other defenders of the 'high culture' approach (Shuker 1994; Longhurst 1995; Negus 1996; Lockard 1998).

Studies in the anthropology of media and popular culture offer stimulating new directions for research (e.g., Ginsburg *et al.* 2002; Chun *et al.* 2004), but some long-standing questions persist. For example, how are we to decide what counts as popular music (Middleton and Horn 1981)? While popular music enthusiasts often take Western classical music to signify everything that popular music is not, Walser (1993), among others, identifies connections between heavy metal and European classical traditions. Hatch suggests that in Indonesia 'almost all *pop* songs sound recognisably Western in ways that *dangdut* and *kroncong* do not' (1989 [1983]: 59), while, as evident in the Smithsonian Folkways 'Music of Indonesia' series, Yampolsky considers *dangdut* and *kroncong* to be popular music in the wider context of Indonesian traditions.

The very notion of 'genre' (*jenis* in Indonesian) is complex and subject to some debate. Yampolsky (2001), for example, suggests that traditional music and its various genres in Indonesia should be defined by the degree of absence of foreign influence, while Zorn (1999) argues that genre labelling is little more than a marketing strategy. Whiteoak (1999) makes the useful distinction between socio-culturally 'approved' and 'anonymous' genres. Frith presents an insightful interpretation of the debates over the significance of genre:

> [T]he rules according to which musicians and critics, salesmen and audiences, agree on genre labels ... can't be determined from the outside, whether by folk purists or subcultural celebrants. They are produced, rather, in the everyday social practices of music-making, music-selling and music-listening.
>
> (Frith 1989: 101)

While Frith's statement helps to validate ethnographic approaches to people's agency and everyday understandings, just how these social and musical practices 'produce' genre labels needs further clarification. Musical genres are not formed into clearly demarcated categories in a power vacuum. Instead, they involve articulations of taste that, borrowing from Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), serve to mark social boundaries. At the same time, the pleasures that people draw from music cannot be reduced entirely to contests for status.

The fluidity of popular culture and musical genre is most evident when considering the physical setting in which musical activity occurs. In his introductory survey, Manuel identifies connections between level of industrialization, producer/consumer differentiation and the rise of popular music in particular locations. However, he qualifies these with significant examples:

> India ... may have highly developed heavy industry, but film music may be quite popular in some rural areas that are not remotely industrialized. Similarly, industrialization is extremely limited in Afghanistan, but a sort of urban popular music (*kiliwali*), disseminated primarily via radio and cassettes, has indeed risen there.
>
> (Manuel 1988: 2)

Related to this, Middleton (1990: 4–5) highlights the inadequacy of 'technologico-economic' definitions of popular music. He points out that a Tchaikovsky symphony on CD is tied in to high technology and commodification while, conversely, people 'jamming' on a Bruce Springsteen song on guitars at a party are re-adapting 'commodified' music to a 'folk' situation. These examples demonstrate the complex and uneven relationship between musical genres, the media of their transmission, and levels of industrialization and other indicators of development in the surrounding society. In light of these factors, I suggest that popular culture is a concept capable of bringing seemingly unrelated social phenomena into comparative focus. Musical practices in the 'indigenous city' of Yogyakarta provide a good case in point, as I will seek to demonstrate with reference to its neighbourhoods and commercial zones.

These popular culture, musical genre, and contextual factors complexify simple readings of high/popular, traditional/modern, and related classifications of musical practice. Furthermore, they present possibilities for identifying aspects of everyday social relations in Southeast Asia that political and economic approaches tend to overlook or dismiss. Wong shows how heavy metal music in Malaysia has enabled young followers to cross racial and religious boundaries in a context of rapid urban development (1995 [1993]). In 2000–2001, I noticed that some 'alternative pop' (*pop alternatif*) songs facilitated similar boundary crossings in Indonesia. For example, many ethnic Javanese enjoyed 'Bruce Lee' by Jun Fan Gung Foo. Wallach

(2002) suggests that many in the lower social strata accepted such *pop alternatif* songs associated with urban middle-class youth, but then argues that this did not in any significant way challenge widening social inequalities. It was, nevertheless, evident that 'Bruce Lee' in Yogyakarta helped to alleviate Javanese/ethnic-Chinese and lower/middle-class tensions.[2]

These *musik pop* cases give a sense of how music can help to negotiate peaceful social relations in contexts of tension or conflict, but they also privilege the unification of youth groups against apparently conservative older generations. At times I witnessed how music can enhance intergenerational interactions. A clear case of this was neighbourhood dancing to 'Poco-Poco', an activity also of significance to inter-ethnic relations as Poco-Poco is a song and dance from eastern Indonesia. Additionally, several *kroncong* groups in Yogyakarta included members of all age groups. More specifically, my main informants were community leaders and former street-musicians aged in their mid-30s. As well as working with different class, ethnic, and religious groups, they often played intergenerational mediating roles. In the following cases, I investigate gender, class, and generational dimensions of participants' identities at popular musical events in Yogyakarta.

Yogyakarta (or 'Jogja') in central Java is a 'special region' within the Republic of Indonesia, and is the region's capital city. The city has a vibrant arts scene and progressive student activism amidst its 'refined' (*halus*) Sultanate culture and numerous government institutions. It is a major centre of cultural tourism, and is world-renowned for its *gamelan* ensembles and *wayang* puppet theatre. Researchers and commentators have often divided the Javanese into opposing social groups: *wong gede* and *wong cilik*, *priyayi* and *abangan*, gentry and commoner, king and peasant. These divisions are, in turn, seen to be reflections of *halus* ('pure, refined, polished, polite, exquisite, ethereal, subtle, civilized, smooth') or *kasar* ('impolite, rough, uncivilized; a badly played piece of music, a stupid joke, a cheap piece of cloth') qualities and characteristics (Geertz 1960: 232; also Chapter 1 in this book). In this schema, the highly animated popular performances below are *kasar*, particularly against the refinements of courtly *gamelan*.

While Government censuses (BPS 2000) suggest that Yogyakarta's population has not changed significantly over the past 20 years, inner-city congestion has certainly intensified, in large part due to the workers, students, and others who almost double the population every day (Sasongko 2001). Additionally, with the city merging into villages in every direction, the region around the city includes some of the most densely populated rural areas in the world.[3] People with a wide range of livelihoods and lifestyles inhabit the bustling inner-city area, an indicator of which is the myriad uses of technology. Thousands of motorcycles cram the roads, along with pedicabs, horse-and-carts, old buses, and bicycles. Garbage collectors pull heavy carts by hand, while aeroplanes fly overhead.[4] Countless government administration offices and education institutions each feature cumbersome

filing cabinets and manual typewriters. The only high technology cinema burnt down years ago, leaving only those built a few decades before that. At the same time, dozens of internet cafes and VCD libraries were already enjoying high levels of business by 2001, and technology-savvy mobile phone users numbered in their thousands.

By analysing non-verbal forms of communication and interaction at neighbourhood and commercial-zone musical events, I seek to identify connections between intergenerational/communal and cross-cultural/commercial influences on gendered identities. Age and generational variation was extensive in neighbourhoods, while in commercial zones class and ethnic markers were relatively prominent. Comparing these in the context of popular culture debates offers one way of interpreting social life in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Other Worlds Musical Physicalization

I use the term 'musical physicalization' to describe the manifested physical behaviours and gendered interactions that arise around or through music. These include, but are not restricted to, dance. 'Dance', according to Hanna, is 'purposeful [and] intentionally rhythmical' (1988: 46), and, with instructive insight, Cowan analyses dance events as 'ensemble[s] of practices that compose [them], including feasting, talking, singing, and dancing' (1990: 20–21). However, musical physicalization is *any* bodily movement that occurs because, or at least as an influence, of music. These movements include leaving a room suddenly filled with raucous music, largely unconscious toe-tapping or trance motions, through to dance styles such as the Indonesian *joged*, waltzing, and 'head banging', motives for which include community building, to woo and flatter, release energy, earn money and/or please or challenge the powerful, to name but a few.

There are, I would argue, three principal kinds or variants of musical physicalization manifested in Yogyakarta, which I describe as Detachment–Engagement, Sexualization and, to be explored here, Other Worlds.[5] Other Worlds refers to highly physicalized dance and/or related bodily movements that indicate a person or group's attempted or actual entrance into another consciousness or alternative state of being. As I will show, women, men, and children in neighbourhoods enjoyed viewing the Other Worlds *jatilan* trance dance without any obvious connection to venerated spiritualism. In commercial zones, a related form of musical physicalization was evident at the Kridosono Sports Hall, with such movements generally enacted to challenge or defy the refined (*halus*) pompousness of 'high society'. In all of these cases, I focus on the intersections between musical genre and gender, class and intergenerational interactions. As outlined earlier, by doing so, I aim to complexify dichotomies such as power/oppression, immobility/mobility, urban/rural and traditional/modern, as they are often applied to society in Java.

My focus on Other Worlds is derived from a tradition of popular and scholarly fascination with spiritualism, mind-altering drugs, and other means to alternative realities, particularly as manifested in Javanese mysticism (e.g. Wilson 1999), and in relatively recent 'rave cultures' associated mostly with Western youth subcultures (e.g. Martin 1999). However, Other Worlds physicalizations were also evident in menacing parades of motorbikers (*pawai*) on political campaigns tearing up streets in black balaclavas, some with passengers wielding metal batons and often flanked by army-fatigued security. At times in Yogyakarta these centred directly on neighbourhoods (as enemy territory) (Kristiansen 2003) and commercial zones (as sites of decadence).

Music is sometimes implicated in these processes (Nettl 1956: 9; Stokes 1994). Some of these gangs, a street-guide told me, chanted their way into a warring mode before bearing their political party regalia and setting out on the road from their village and into the city. At the same time, actual incidents of violence in Yogyakarta were quite rare which, I suggest, was to a considerable degree aided by the city's rich musical life. Folk-rock legend Sawung Jabo chuckled as he told me that *pawai* in Yogyakarta were basically harmless, adding that many participants popped pills before embarking on their journeys, soon merrily 'jamming' with their rasping mufflers rather than seeking to frighten the general public (see also Brata 1999).

While Other Worlds physicalization, therefore, has its aggressive and potentially violent variants, the following cases are more representative of the physicalizations that arose in Yogyakarta's neighbourhoods and commercial zones. I ask how such acting out might reflect, challenge, or otherwise influence gender and related social divisions. The following section describes the most popular of Other Worlds neighbourhood performances, the *jatilan* trance dance, a kind of animist-oriented entertainment, the viewing of which was widely enjoyed by females and males of all ages. The section after that deals with events at the Kridosono Sports Hall and Stadium where, whatever else was happening, performers often enacted Other Worlds physicalizations of oppositional political statements accompanied by unusually even numbers of women and men on the dance floor.

Jatilan Trance Dance in Neighbourhoods

Musical physicalizations of the type I am calling Other Worlds have a long history in Java. Numerous indigenist or regionalist performance types have long challenged stereotypes of conservatism in Java. These include *jaipongan*, *tayuban*, *reog ponorogo*, and *ronggengan*.[6] Some of these are difficult to disentangle from certain styles of the *joged* dancing associated with *dangdut* music, particularly in surrounding villages and at the annual Night Fair at the Sultan's Palace. Here I restrict my attention to the *jatilan* trance dance, as during my research this was an immensely popular Other Worlds musical physicalization in city neighbourhoods and surrounding villages.

Jatilan is generally performed in a cordoned-off arena, within which the dancers enter into a trance, either suddenly or gradually. This involves high levels of physicalization, as reflected in performers' trance-like or possessed movements and facial expressions. Wienarti (1968) has discussed *jatilan* and its animist associations, as well as its historical function in rites of passage such as marriage.[7] As I observed it in 2001, *jatilan* was noteworthy for the way in which the trance phases signalled performers' entrance to another world and because audiences consisted of women, men, *and* children.

My first encounter with *jatilan* occurred one midnight after my main informant Satya and I arrived at his house at the foot of Mount Merapi around 15 kilometres north of Yogyakarta. A deep rhythmic gong resonated across the area, which Satya said sounded like a *jatilan* event, and we took the half-kilometre walk to witness it. Apart from a few people at market stalls along the narrow entrance track, all 300 people present were either squeezing forth against the mud-floored arena ringed with bamboo slats or perched on the sloping ground overlooking it. There were fairly even numbers of women, men, and children, with many draped in mountain shawls. Inside the arena, half-a-dozen men were staggering about while twisting and contorting their bodies, and to the rear, the blaringly amplified and brilliant band included *kendang* drum, various *gamelan* gong instruments, and standard rock drums, with a man and a woman singing in turns.

The dimly lit arena initially looked to me like the dancefloor at a drunken bush party, but it was soon clear that the men were trance dancing, with a shaman between them and the band members cracking a whip around and across the unflinching performers. After a lull, by which time Satya and I secured a position against the ring, we watched a *kuda lumping* (toy-horse) dance from beginning to end. Two rows of four men in matching red costumes and make-up holding a hobbyhorse lined up, and then began stepping delicately in formation as the music built up in tempo and volume. The singing, which I was subsequently told is incidental compared with the deep rhythms of the gong, gradually shifted from the *pesinden*-style of a *gamelan* orchestra to popular *campursari* melodies (Perlman 1999: 6–8; Richter 2006: 181–89). The rhythms, particularly those of the rock drummer, departed increasingly from a set beat to include drum rolls, and the shaman crouched before the band with his arms outstretched and sweeping slowly in different directions.

Within minutes, some of the dancers' eyes began to roll and soon after mayhem broke out. Not only did the dancers prance about with ecstatic expressions, oblivious to the whip cracking and, subsequently, searing heat of the flames some swallowed, but a couple of the dancing men hurled themselves *out of* the arena and ran away down the hill. With many in the audience shrieking and laughing, an even more startling turn occurred: a man from the audience dressed in standard old slacks and body shirt lurched *into* the arena and began snorting and galloping from end to end like a crazed stallion. Eventually, the shaman and a couple of assistants shepherded him to a

corner, where they removed a large machete from his possession and he began to calm down.[8] When we left at 2 a.m., the *jatilan* was showing no signs of drawing to a close. Indeed, it was to continue until morning.

While the *jatilan* trance dance was fascinating in itself, my concern here is with what comparisons between neighbourhood and commercial-zone physicalizations can tell us about intergroup, particularly intergender relations. I witnessed four other *jatilan*s, all of which took place in urban neighbourhoods. A number of contrasts between the village event and those closer to the city were evident. The city *jatilan*s took place in the middle of the day, generally around Independence Day. The audiences were made up of people of all ages, but in the city there were more mothers with young children, as well as young men with dyed hair and other signs of Westernist punk and grunge affiliation.[9] Boys and young men also performed in the urban *jatilan*s. However, here the build up to the trance was of longer duration, all subsequently fell into a violent heap and, upon rising to their feet, began trance dancing together. And on one occasion, the shaman had difficulty returning a 14-year-old boy to 'this world'. Each time he drew the boy to him to help him exit the trance, something would again snatch the boy away; after several such attempts the boy was crying, his face contorted with pain.

The large audiences for *jatilan* attested to its widespread popularity. Williams (1991: 121) suggests that participating in the dance allows young males to release energy non-violently. However, opinions among those I spoke with varied. Back in the city after the above village performance, a sex-worker quipped that as far as she was concerned *jatilan* was bad (*jahat*) as it involved *Setan* (Satan, the Devil). According to Williams (1991: 124), this was the attitude only of stricter Muslims. Staff members at a backpacker restaurant beamed with pride when they told me they also had *jatilan* in their villages. One added that in her village there were even women trance-dancers. My home stay manager also seemed more pleased than embarrassed that a Westerner had taken an interest in the form. She commented that the inner-city neighbourhood occasionally also had *jatilan*, adding that they also performed a 'wild boar' (*babi hutan*) trance dance. Another woman remarked, with little apparent remorse, that *jatilan*'s entertainment function had largely supplanted the spiritual significance previously attached to it.

A person's opinion on *jatilan* reveals something about his or her attitude towards science and rationalism. The people I spoke to either deemed the trance a hoax or believed in its powers, with the latter further divided according to whether they believed it a good or a bad thing. Like the musicians who performed at the Sultan's Palace in Yogyakarta, those who believed in the supernatural aspects of *jatilan* were also fully able to engage in the everyday, material world. Cultural setting and the use of modern technology did not necessarily affect the potency of *jatilan*, at least in the minds of those who considered it an actual and positive phenomenon. For example, a *jatilan* performance took place in the car park of the inner-city

Hotel Garuda one afternoon, with most of those looking on being street-traders taking time out from their work. A young man in slacks and checked shirt suddenly began hopping about, and then leapt into the fray inside the arena. On another afternoon in the city, two teenage boys in *kuda lumping* (toy-horse) costumes went busking from door to door with pre-recorded music. Reflecting on this, my informant mentioned that the medium is of little importance in relation to entering the trance; indeed, he added, if children in the villages are introduced to heavy metal music from infancy, then that can also facilitate entrance into trance.

Based on the above, I suggest that the appeal of neighbourhood *jatilan* performances for most onlookers was based primarily on the fact that they allowed people to view familiar neighbours entering into an unfamiliar, other world of trance. My informants agreed that the practice was a product of indigenous rather than Islamic, Western, or even centuries-old Hindu influences. *Jatilan* audiences included 'alternative' youth, but they also spanned all generations, and sometimes women outnumbered men. Unlike those of the commercial-zone events I shall describe below, *jatilan* audiences remained physically immobile and separate from (though in thrilling proximity to) the performers, except for the occasional audience member who, entranced, entered the arena.

The actions of *jatilan* performers on centre stage can be related to gender roles and relations. The shaman, always a male, along with the deep gong players wielded the transformative power needed to transport the dancers to the other world. The shaman's movements were poised and deliberate, while those of the trance dancers were its unpredictable and unwieldy opposite. These roles in turn can be related to factors of gender, physicality, and power. The 'feminized' appearance and movements of the dancers can be seen to draw on ideas about the subordinate 'irrational' female, something Sullivan (1994: 170) points out in her discussion of communal rituals.[10] By contrast, the poised and deliberate moves of the shaman may be seen as masculine and potent (cf. Errington 1990: 41–42). However, it is also the case that viewing *jatilan* in exclusively gender terms misses much of the central focus. Of equal, if not greater, importance were the dichotomies of science versus magic, and good versus bad, and of a form of popular entertainment that brought all neighbourhood members together.

Metal, Underground, and Electronic at Kridosono Hall

In this section, I discuss Other Worlds musical physicalizations at Kridosono Sports Hall, a large commercial establishment. As I will show, performances here contrasted with those in neighbourhoods in terms of event theme or 'function', audience/performer separations, and intergenerational involvement, but they also had parallels. Before turning to the specific cases, however, it is important to mention that live rock music and commercial zones do occasionally incite violence. Anti-foreigner rallies and threats,

perhaps the most overt anti-foreigner sentiments in pre-'September 11' Indonesia, were centred on high-class hotels in neighbouring Surakarta ('Solo'). Amid the great political change in Yogyakarta in this period, violence and vandalism occasionally besieged alcohol-centred, rock music venues. Violence is also associated with large-scale rock concerts, its target often being the Indonesian rather than any foreign government (e.g. Sen and Hill 2000: 183). Sawung Jabo told me of his group's dilemma that their fans would riot if they did *not* play their oppositional classics.

The line between oppositional protest and wanton destruction can, therefore, be blurred. However, it remains that many Western scholars associate 'underground', 'punk', 'black metal', and related genres at the more abrasive end of Indonesia's pop–rock spectrum with symbolic protest, self-expression, and democratic progressiveness (Baulch 1996; Pickles 2000; Bodden 2005). In this section, I describe and discuss performances that fit broadly within this cluster of genres, but do so in the specific context of exploring commercial-zone physicalizations. All of the performances featured Other Worlds physicalizations by performers and, to varying degrees, audiences, and they all took place at Kridosono Sports Hall, located on a busy roundabout connecting the downtown area to Solo Road and Gadjah Mada University.

In the light of day, Kridosono Sports Hall was quite run-down, standing in stark contrast to most international hotel and *kafe* venues around the city. In spite of this, or perhaps because of its relative affordability, the hall was a popular venue for events involving the chiefly youth-oriented hard rock and 'electronic' musical worlds or subcultures. Officially, the event themes were driven by commercial considerations, as reflected in admission charges, band contests with prize money, extensive sponsor signage, album promotions, and the often-elaborate props and lighting that went into transforming the venue. In practice, however, participation in the events did not revolve around commodity consumption. Instead, the events tended to create situations in which performers and audience alike expressed themselves and released tensions through musical physicalization, which often included symbolic gestures pertaining to some aspect of identity politics. These experiences, I will suggest, were in various ways embodied and carried into daily life.

Rock Festivals

Many rock festivals involving bands from the region took place at Kridosono and elsewhere in Yogyakarta. One of these was the Ninth Annual Djarum Rock Festival held in May 2001.[11] With a half-hour break for evening prayers, the semi-final ran from 3 p.m. until midnight, with 32 Central Java and Yogyakarta bands playing two original songs each, to be narrowed down to 10 finalists. Security outside the hall was quite lax, with only a handful of police-officers lounging sleepily by the entrance. Inside the hall

by contrast, the MC's officious tone seemed to convey his concern that the flow of events could unravel into chaos at any moment.

A key physicalization feature of at least the mid-section of this evening was the disjuncture between performers and audience. After the MC's introduction, each band sprang to the stage with their instruments, plugged in, launched into their two songs, and then left just as promptly, all with remarkable efficiency. The dozen bands I saw blasted out a powerful rock volume. The most common musical arrangement was a high-pitched heavy metal-toned singer underpinned by screeching guitars, pumping bass, and crashing drums, but there was also considerable variety. In one band, members wore bright tracksuits, including a young woman on bass who strutted funk-style. In another, the five men were barely distinguishable in their jet-black apparel and the theatrical sweeping of their long hair. In yet another, a girl swayed her head about intensely while DJ-scratching on a turntable above and behind the other instrumentalists. None of the performers I saw was motionless even for a moment; even those bound to their instruments such as drums and keyboards ricocheted their bodies with, and in turn re-modified, the crashing, tremendous sounds.

By contrast, the spectators sat perched forward but immobile. Audience numbers averaged around 500 but rose and ebbed in part based on the level of support for particular bands. Over three-quarters of the audience were young men in their late teens and early 20s who, along with everyone else and in contrast to the frenetic activity on stage, remained seated in the elevated rows some distance from the stage. While no-one danced or even clapped along during the music, some bands received rapt applause and cheers, and most in the audience leant forward with interest toward the stage, evidently in awe of the thundering sound and Other Worlds band theatrics, rather than their largely undecipherable lyrics. In this case, then, highly animated physicalization was integral to the performance, yet audiences experienced the event without a correspondingly mobile physicalization, instead sitting still to listen to and absorb the performances.

Another rock festival at Kridosono Hall produced greater levels of physicalization in the audience, largely I suggest due to the bands' performances and the generally older, more educated, and gender-balanced audience. This was the final of the 'Twelve Best Student Bands in Central Java' competition, which attracted perhaps double the audience of the Djarum semi-final. The event, sponsored by the 'Boom Mints' Company, comprised a variety of bands along the pop to rock spectrum and included a sophisticated lighting system. It headlined with 'BIP', three members being formerly with the nationally famous 'underground' group 'Slank'.[12] The festival contestants included a teenage-girl dance troupe, who alternated between precise but quite mechanical cheer-squad movements and looser and highly sexualized hip swivelling, all to pre-recorded Madonna-style music. Next was 'No Rain', a smartly dressed group that played the theme tune from the US sitcom 'Friends' and then a couple of songs featuring

wall-of-sound effects reminiscent of U2 and other groups using post-new wave equipment.

The attentive, but largely placid and immobile, reception for these acts was soon ruptured by audience responses to the 'grindcore' group 'Radikal Corps'. When Radikal Corps began, a sizeable black-clothed sector of the audience ran to the wire fence in front of the stage. Each fan broke into a tortured 'life is a cage' dance, some cast their knees into the air while marching in circles, some pounding their upper bodies back and forth in a haze of hair; others clasped onto the fence and imitated thumping their heads against a wall. During Radikal Corps' second song, around 50 fans were whirling in circles and pounding their limbs in all directions. Band members pounced and growled around the stage, with their non-verbal messages of angst and protest accentuated by the singer and guitarist's anti-nuclear t-shirts. The group played a few more songs, in each case giving rise to increasingly animated Other Worlds physicalizations. Then, with remarkable and sudden politeness, the group left the stage and their followers returned to their places, after which a celebrity MC gave out awards for best vocalist, best guitarist, and the like. Then came the finale, guest stars BIP.

From the moment the MC announced BIP, a roar echoed across the entire stadium. The venue was transformed from a largely seated event to hundreds of people scrambling to get as close as possible to the band, the fence by this stage having been cleared. The band and their music were very dynamic, with the singer running from one end of the stage to the other and clapping his hands in the air, the musicians swaying and bumping widely. They played anthem-like renditions of both Slank evergreens and newer hits such as 'Andaikata', playing many passages repeatedly and at ever-decreasing volume to allow the singing audience to be part of the music. In these ways, BIP induced a kind of Rock-God hysteria reminiscent of 1970s heavy metal (Walser 1993), and within minutes had transformed the hall into an arena full of, generally young, men and women dancing with unusual lack of restraint. Musical physicalization in this case extended to most people in the audience, whose heads, arms and/or whole bodies swayed and swung to the music and the rock stars performing it on stage.

While these two rock festivals featured performers characterized by highly animated physicalizations, audiences became physically mobilized only in the latter case. To an unusual extent for a commercial event in Yogyakarta, the BIP performance facilitated a seemingly liberating, non-threatening form of physical engagement (or dance) with music for both women and men. Whether or to what extent this manifestation of popular culture was merely fleeting or was more enduring and socially enriching is a question I will return to. To inform this further, the following, final case presents a contrasting example of Other Worlds musical physicalization.

Parkinsound3

A two-evening electronic music festival that took place at Kridosono in early July 2001 was to culminate into an especially vivid example of widely participatory popular culture. This was the third annual ParkinSound Performance (known as Parkinsound3), a product of Yogyakarta Electronic Music Movement, 'Performance Fucktory', and numerous well-heeled sponsors.[13] As stated in the promotional literature, musical genres included 'techno, ambience, trip-hop, jungle, drum'n'bass, deep house, industrial and break beat'. And the term ParkinSound combined the following meanings: 'park in sound', an abstract garden in the din of voices/sounds; 'parkin sound', and place where all sounds can park; and, phonetically, you hear the sound 'Parkinson', a situation in which a breakdown of the central nervous system occurs.

'Electronic music' and its associated social networks and events in Indonesia shared some features with 'rave culture', although, in 2001, rave parties seemed inconceivable to the Indonesian electronic music followers I talked with. There were, however, formal venues such as 'The Stadiun' in Jakarta, with some guests attending from 2 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sundays, and where all floor staff openly sold ecstasy tablets. In Yogyakarta, a flyer for a 'Temple of Light' show at 'Goedang Music' suggested an internationalist rave-style event. By contrast, the Parkinsound3 event had a number of distinctive features. Unlike raves, where clandestine arrangements culminate in all-night dance parties with open drug-taking, affected hedonism, and dazzling light and sound shows, Parkinsound3 was openly advertised, public, took place over a prescribed period, and, as I will further discuss, featured conventional rock instruments, a central stage, and distinctly Other Worlds physicalizations.

The set-up for Parkinsound3 was immense, including five large platform stages arranged in the shape of a diamond, dozens of light-housings, and various turntables and sampling bays as well as standard rock instruments and amplifiers. In the evening,[14] the audience steadily increased, by 10 p.m. numbering well over a thousand. Many were university students and their friends, including many visitors from Jakarta. The average age was around 20 years, with many dressed self-consciously in second-hand or homemade clothing. Thirty-five per cent or more was female, an unusually high proportion for evening public entertainment in Yogyakarta City.

The most outstanding feature in common among the 18 bands was that, unlike most techno music in the West, here the practices of sampling, looping, drum-machines, and DJ-scratching were, in almost all cases, mixed with those of standard pop/rock instruments and sounds. This reflected a combination of the participants' wishes to maintain the 'hands-on' interpersonal aspects of instrumental playing, and the more practical consideration that most music-makers in Yogyakarta played instruments.

Some groups conveyed sounds and sensibilities reminiscent of the alienated industrialism and/or semi-androgyny of 1980s UK groups such as

The Cure and New Order, as well as the experimental Icelandic artist Bjork. One group ingeniously incorporated 'world music' samples such as sitar drones and 'Dead Can Dance' excerpts, while one of them played an actual Sundanese *rebab* (Muslim spiked fiddle). In another case, a young woman maintained a downcast expression while droning 'I don't want to forget' repeatedly, with the jangle-toned guitarist holding the rhythm. The subtle and expressionistic musings of such groups received appreciative applause and some gentle swaying from among the audience.

The appearance of 'Teknoshit' heralded a phase of overtly political messages and highly anguished physicalization on centre stage.[15] One piece culminated with the singer delivering a passionate anti-discrimination monologue with phrases such as 'we're all the same, women and men' (*Kita semua sama, perempuan dan laki-laki*). The group roused many in the audience into shouting and, eventually, cheering and applauding. While the audience sat or stood in front of the stages for most of the evening, after Teknoshit finished performing Marzuki, the organizer, urged the audience to get up from their seats. Soon, hundreds were making their way to the floor to dance.

As more and more people moved onto the dancefloor and the next band began their deeply pulsating music, the organizers added to the celebration by throwing dozens of fluorescent necklaces into the audience. Practically everyone in the hall, including young women in red and other brightly coloured *jilbab* (Muslim headscarves), was now dancing. Covering the floor from one end of the hall to the other, the dancers threw their arms high into the air and stepped and swayed in time to the pounding beat, swinging their heads from side to side. The dancing and cheering continued for the next half-hour. As with the rock festivals described above, Parkinsound3 finished abruptly around midnight, but unlike most other public music events in Yogyakarta, large sections of the audience lingered at the venue. Combining their modernist subcultural style markers with more traditional social practices, people sat in groups and talked, in no rush to reconvene elsewhere or retire for the night.

The three events at Kridosono Sports Hall discussed above all gave rise to Other Worlds musical physicalization. Unlike music's relatively incidental roles in Yogyakarta's larger hotels and entertainment *kafe*, at Kridosono musical performance was central to participants' attendance and behaviours. At these events, political messages, more and less direct, produced Other Worlds physicalization in women and men. Teknoshit bellowed for an end to gender discrimination; Radikal Corps growled and snarled incoherently; and BIP delivered their songs with an air of light-heartedness and celebration. In each case, both men and women danced.

These Other Worlds physicalizations varied according to musical genre and performance setting, and in turn to the age, class, and gender characteristics of participants. The Djarum rock festival included numerous female performers, although the young, immobile audience was mainly

male. Both the BIP and Parkinsound3 concerts included unusually large proportions of young women, with some of the most unrestrained mixed-gender dancing that I witnessed in Yogyakarta City. In turn, participants involved in musical physicalizations at events such as these had an air of independence as in the musical subcultures described by Hebdige (1979). In the case of Yogyakarta, style among these youth and young adults was less an outright rejection of old-fashioned (*kolot*) norms and sensibilities than a physical and attitudinal stance; less intended to shock or offend than to embody and display the markers of a counter-culture.

In this chapter, I have compared Other Worlds musical physicalizations at a small number of popular events that took place in Yogyakarta's neighbourhoods and commercial zones. Neighbourhood *jatilan* performances induced thrilled giggles and gasps from the largely lower (or working)-class audience, especially from women and children. At the Kridosono venue by contrast, the vast majority of those involved were middle-class youth and young adults. Although the performance stages were largely separate from audiences, here audience physicalization at times blended with that of the performers. For most, the thundering volume and bass rhythm induced a form of physicalization, perhaps at times involuntary or only semi-conscious. At a minimum, this might involve perching forward or head-nodding. When this became extreme, performer and audience physicalizations did not manifest themselves in sexual display, but instead demonstrated resistance to socio-political oppression through exhibiting a kind of bodily anguish. Despite differences of age, spatial arrangements, and musical genres, both forms of Other Worlds physicalization were highly animated expressions of popular culture, and both tended to play down rather than accentuate conventional gender differences and sexuality.

Correspondences between these highly animated forms (or modes) of musical physicalization can also be related to the 'traditional' idea of power in Javanese culture, in that immobility reflects and conveys power while high levels of physicalization do not. However, attention to musical context, genre, and identity helps to problematize overly simplistic readings of the relations between gender, autonomy, and power in contemporary urban Java. This has been demonstrated through the relatively gender-neutral *jatilan* performances, and in the animation and empowerment of young women and men in Other Worlds commercial zones. As such, highly animated popular performance in these cases was a vehicle for so-called 'coarse' (*kasar*) women and men to transcend the gender divisions that, in various guises, characterize much performance amongst refined Javanists, purist Muslims, and sexualized Westerners alike.

Of the several dozen evening public entertainments I observed in Yogyakarta City, underground and electronic music events presented the clearest cases of high levels of physical interaction between males and females. Most participants were between 18 and 25 years of age, and were not lower-class. Notwithstanding these class and intergenerational restrictions on involvement, dance and per-

formance here was notably unconstrained by gender division and sexual tension. Many participants were university students living in sex-segregated dormitories, which had curfews. As such, these musical events arguably produced 'Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ)', free enclaves that allow participants to escape the clutches of state and commercial power (cf. Balliger 1995: 19–23). In these ways, Other Worlds commercial-zone events in Yogyakarta to various degrees enabled participants to challenge and transcend the homogenized gender roles imposed through state conservatism and globalized commodification.

As was the case in the Kridosono events, the *jatilan* neighbourhood performances seemed to nullify gender tensions rather than intensify them through sexualization. However, these neighbourhood Other Worlds events differed from those at Kridosono in two main ways. First, a more diverse audience attended *jatilan*, in generational and, to an extent, class terms. Second, audience/performer lines generally remained separate, both spatially and in terms of Other Worlds physicalization. Both *jatilan* and 'electronic' are forms of popular culture, but individuals' degree of participation in such events varied primarily according to age and class. These two sets of popular performance, viewed in the wider context of identity formation and social change, demonstrate that the social and cultural influences of commerce and traditionalism are varied and not always mutually exclusive. This chapter has identified and analysed variations of musical genre and cultural setting at two kinds of popular performance in Yogyakarta. By demonstrating that Other Worlds musical physicalization at these events helps to transcend generational, class and gender divisions, I conclude that contemporary popular performance in Southeast Asia is worthy of serious attention.

Glossary

Alternative: a sensibility or stance consciously pitted against the perceived mainstream of society

Campursari: 'mixed essences'; combines *gamelan* ensembles with Western diatonic instruments such as bass guitar, hi-tech keyboards and saxophone, and regional and national forms and instruments (e.g. *kroncong* ukuleles, *dangdut* drum)

Dangdut: Indonesian musical genre combining influences from Hindi film music, Melayu orchestras, Islamic ethics and heavy metal guitar

Jatilan: form of trance dance popular in Yogyakarta

Joged: a distinctly Indonesian/Malay form of social dancing, often performed in couples

Kroncong: Indonesian musical genre combining influences from Jakarta (Betawi) and West Java, Eastern Indonesia, Hawaii and the former Portuguese empire

Pesinden: female singers in *gamelan* ensembles
Rave culture: a subculture centred around rave parties and their associated musics, clothing styles and mannerisms

Notes

1 In fifteenth century England, 'popular' was a legal and political term meaning 'belonging to the people' (Williams 1976: 236). 'Popular' may still carry this connotation in contemporary usage, and related to this also refers simply to anything enjoyed or admired by many people or specific social groups. However, 'popular' has also long had pejorative associations with inferiority and contrived populism (Savage 1995). Similarly, 'culture' is an exceedingly broad term. In one reading, culture refers to high-class activities and artefacts such as opera, fine art, and high cuisine. This is an evaluative use of the term, to the extent that it leads to a perception of people having more ('high') or less ('low') culture. A second conception of culture is pluralized. Here, at least in principle, social groups and societies do not have more or less culture so much as cultures that are merely different (Stocking 1968; Moore 1997: 17–28, 42–52).
In Indonesia, 'culture' and 'civilization' are most often described as *budaya* or *kebudayaan* (Echols and Shadily 1982). In common parlance, people in Indonesia tend to speak of culture in the plural, but many also attach evaluative status to it. So, for example, 'Javanese culture' (*budaya Jawa*) is generally seen as encapsulating a high, refined form of etiquette, language use, art, and mystical practice (Geertz 1960). At the same time, the adjective 'Javanese' also implies that there is more than one set of criteria.
2 Although the music of Jun Fan Gung Foo is 'ska', the name of the band derives from 'Jun Fan' (Bruce Lee's original name) and 'Gung Foo', a play on words from Kung Fu. Most importantly in this context, the name deliberately sounds 'Chinese'. Paradoxically, the song helped to promote peaceful inter-ethnic relations, and yet it was about the heroic exploits of a fighter.
3 According to a recent article, over 1,600 people per square kilometre live in Bantul, the area worst hit by the earthquake that struck south of Yogyakarta City in 2006 (World Bank 2006).
4 On a return visit in 2005, aeroplanes flew overhead with far greater frequency than had been the case in 2001. This was due to the rapid expansion of new airline companies and more economical fares.
5 Joel Kahn first suggested the terms 'musical physicalization' and 'sexualization' to me; I devised the terms 'Detachment–Engagement' and 'Other Worlds' subsequent to that. Detachment–Engagement refers to behaviours around music that proceed from complete physical immobility, to active, but still relatively understated, engagement, and finally back to disengagement, such as often occurs at formal functions. Sexualization is the physical movements at musical performances that individuals more or less explicitly model on sexual intercourse.
6 On *Tayuban*, see Utami and Gombloh (2001); on *Reog Ponorogo*, see Wilson (1999); on *Ludruk* 'low clowns' over an important period of Indonesian history, see Peacock (1968); on relations between some of these performance types, gender, and *dangdut*, see Pioquinto (1995).
7 Tracing these kinds of terms etymologically is difficult due to changing or rivalling spelling conventions. *Jatilan* for example has also been spelt *jadhilan* and *jathilan*. In terms of the meaning of the term: *jatilan* > *jatil* > *titik* > (v) 'to drop'. A dance within the *jatilan* category is *jaranan*, also known as *djaranan*, and *kuda lumping*. This can be translated to: *jaranan* > *jaran* > *kuda* > 'horse'.

8 Numerous people later told me that such possession often occurs to those who have taken part in the past, just as being touched by someone in a trance can.
9 For more on these aspects of street culture, see Berman (2006).
10 Sullivan states these oppositions unambiguously: '*Slamaetan* is essentially a synthesis of male and female parts in a communal whole. In Sitiwaru each part of the *slametan* is fashioned and played out in conformity with its respective stereotype: on one side, the dignified, refined, rational-spiritual, controlled Javanese male: on the other side, the passionate, warm, caring, emotional-irrational and uncontrolled Javanese female. Together these aspects create a harmonious and balanced dualism, a condition so valued in Javanese cosmology and culture' (1994: 170).
11 There was no Djarum Rock Festival in the years 1996–99 because of the greater popularity of *musik pop* over that period.
12 BIP is an acronym of the names of the three former members who had broken off from Slank. According to some music buffs, BIP were less charismatic but by far the best musicians from Slank. On Slank, see Sen and Hill (2000: 178–79); Perlman (1999: 36–37).
13 There were numerous sponsors, according to some including the Ford Foundation. However, the major noted organizational groups were 'Performance Fucktory', the UGM FISIPOL Music Forum, The Indonesia France Institute, and Blass group, while a central individual was Marzuki, who also worked as creative director for the now defunct *Latitudes* cultural magazine.
14 While planned to take place over two evenings, an electrical fault at the beginning of the first night forced the event to be rescheduled for the following afternoon-through-evening.
15 'Teknoshit', when uttered by an Indonesian, generally sounds like 'take no shit'.

Appendix

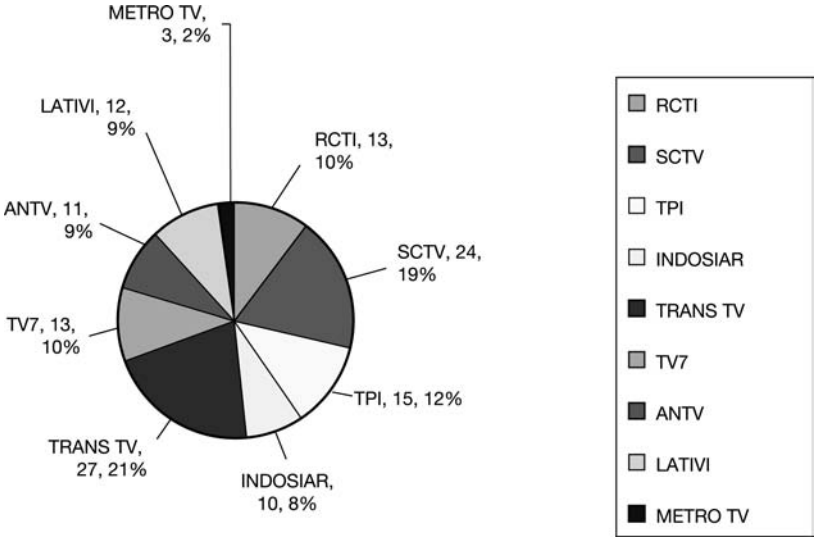

Figure 1 Number of Infotainment programs in a week.

Source: Santosa (2005: 184), reproduced here with permission from the author.

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Note: This index defies the implicit assumption made in English publications, that everyone has a first and last or family name. Many Indonesians (like their first two presidents whose names consist of only one word) have no family names at all, including those whose names consist of more than one or even two words. Among those who do have a family name, some mention it first; others are better known by their given names. In the latter cases they often formally self-identify and are addressed by others by their first names. In these cases, their names are listed below by their given name followed by their family names.

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This book examines popular culture in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and the third largest democracy. It provides a full account of the key trends since the collapse of the authoritarian Suharto regime (1998), a time of great change in Indonesian society more generally. It explains how one of the most significant results of the deepening industrialization in Southeast Asia since the 1980s has been the expansion of consumption and new forms of media, and that Indonesia is a prime example of this development. It goes on to show that although the Asian economic crisis in 1997 had immediate and negative impacts on incumbent governments, as well as the socioeconomic life for most people in the region, at the same time popular cultures have been dramatically reinvigorated as never before. It includes analysis of important themes, including political activism and citizenship, gender, class, age, and ethnicity. Throughout, it shows how the multilayered and contradictory processes of identity formation in Indonesia are inextricably linked to popular culture. This is one of the first books on Indonesia's media and popular culture in English. It is a significant addition to the literature on Asian popular culture, and will be of interest to anyone who is interested in new developments in media and popular culture in Indonesia and Asia.

ROUTLEDGE